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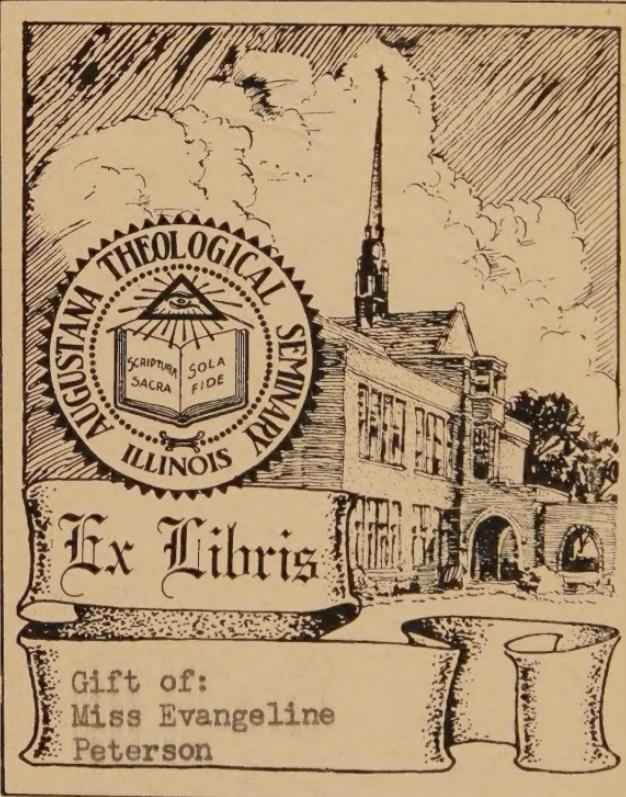
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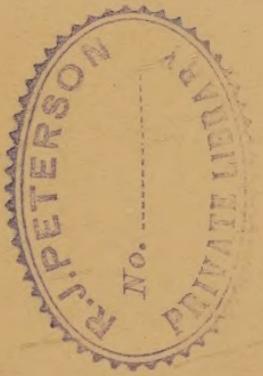
The life of Christ according to St Mark



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THE LIFE OF CHRIST
ACCORDING TO ST MARK

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**THE LIFE OF CHRIST
ACCORDING TO ST MARK**

BY

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PROLOGUE

The object of these studies is to present the impression of Christ which would be derived from St Mark's Gospel by a reader who had no other source of information—a reader who knew nothing of the other Gospels, or of Christian theology. Such an impression would be inadequate, both from the point of view of history and from that of Christian doctrine; nevertheless, it would reveal some features of our Lord's character and work more clearly than a picture which sought to combine in one harmonious whole the information given by the Four Gospels and the doctrines of the Christian creeds and confessions.

CHAPTER I

ANTECEDENTS TO THE MINISTRY

i. 1-13

INTRODUCTION, i. 1-8

“THE beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ”—therefore, as far as the knowledge and judgment of St Mark were concerned, nothing before the coming of John the Baptist was an essential part of the Good News. The Good News, as we gather from the contents of our book, was partly about Jesus, and partly proclaimed by Jesus; it is unfolded in the following chapters. Thus the subject and the preacher are one, “Jesus Christ the Son of God.” The reader would understand from the term “Christ” that Jesus was a Jewish leader and teacher, who was believed to be the Messiah or Saviour-King whom the Jews expected. He would suppose that the man who was called “Christ, the Son of God,” was a teacher with extraordinary

gifts ; but he would easily learn that both the terms "Christ" and "Son of God" were used in many different meanings ; and he would look to the book itself to explain exactly what they meant when they were applied to Jesus of Nazareth.

The Good News about Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, naturally begins with a quotation from the Jewish Scriptures. The title and the quotation show that the work and teaching of Jesus spring out of the religion of Israel. The quotation speaks of a messenger or herald who was to appear in the desert and prepare the way of his Lord by going before Him, and with loud shouts proclaiming His approach. This, then, was to be a token of the Messiah ; He would be preceded by a prophet who would announce His speedy coming. St Mark goes on to tell us that this token had been given in the case of Jesus. There had appeared in the wilderness a certain John the Baptiser, who preached repentance and promised forgiveness, and made his disciples undergo a baptism or ceremonial washing—as a sign,

no doubt, that their sins were washed away. This John had been an ascetic, wearing coarse clothing and eating simple food, and he had brought about a great religious revival; crowds had flocked to him in the wilderness, "the whole district of Judæa and all the men of Jerusalem," and had accepted his baptism. At the very zenith of his fame and influence, John proclaimed the coming of One greater than himself, One so great that John was not fit to untie His shoe-strings. John had baptised with water: the One who was yet to come would baptise with the Holy Spirit. John could only wash the body as a symbol of spiritual cleansing: the Coming One could wash the very souls of men with the Spirit of God.

The token, therefore, had been given; there had come a great prophet who had declared that he was the forerunner of some one far greater than himself; this Greater One, therefore, according to the Old Testament prediction, was the Lord, the Messiah. It is clear from the context that the "Greater One" is Jesus.

The circumstance was remarkable, apart from any question as to the authority of the Jewish Scriptures. There have been many prophets; some of them in their declining years have nominated successors — Moses committed his office to Joshua; the mantle of Elijah was assumed by Elisha—but where else do we read of a great preacher who had drawn a whole people after him declaring in the full tide of his success that he was the mere herald of One greater than himself? The reader would expect much from the Teacher to whom such testimony had been borne.

THE BAPTISM, i. 9-11

While the crowds kept on gathering round John to hear him and to receive his baptism, Jesus came amongst the rest from Nazareth of Galilee. Simply “Jesus . . . from Nazareth,” no other description, nothing about His family. Have we not read that He was “Son of God”? He could derive no additional dignity from the most splendid ancestry. Nothing

about His age or His personal appearance, or His social position, or His occupation. On the last point we shall learn something incidentally further on. The silence as to age suggests that He was in middle life, so that men were not struck by His age, and did not think of Him as either old or young. He came from Nazareth of Galilee, a busy provincial town in a district where many peoples met — Jews, Phœnicians, Syrians, Arabs, Greeks, sometimes even Romans and men of the far East and the far West. A reader might reflect that in such surroundings the smouldering embers of Jewish faith might be kindled afresh into flame at the touch of the free breath of a wider and more vigorous life. This Jesus, therefore, came to John and was baptised; John invited men to repent and offered them forgiveness, and Jesus accepted the invitation. Yet the reader who remembered that He was Christ, the Son of God, the Coming One who was greater than John, would not think of Him as driven from Galilee to the Jordan by the pangs of a guilty conscience. Now and then,

but rarely, very rarely, there arises a prophet so pure and perfect that he does not need to guard his virtue by separating himself from ordinary men. Rather, he is possessed by a sense of fellowship with that life of humanity of which his own life is a part; he repents on behalf of the impenitent, and seeks forgiveness for those who are yet hardened in sin. So it came about that Jesus took His seat on the "penitent form" of His days; but the casual spectator saw no difference between Him and the sinners crowding to be baptised; it seemed to be His "conversion" as well as theirs.

And indeed the Baptism was the occasion of a spiritual crisis, one of those personal experiences of God which make men into prophets. "Forthwith," says St Mark,—we may pause for a moment over the word, because we shall meet with it again and again; nearly everything happens "forthwith." The brief career of Jesus was an hour of crowded life in which one critical event after another presented itself with startling suddenness. The Evangelist tells

his story in a somewhat breathless fashion ; the mingled awe, excitement, and fascination of those marvellous days still stir within him.

“Forthwith, as He came up out of the water” in which He had been baptised, “He saw the heavens part asunder, and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove, and a voice came from heaven, ‘Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased.’” He had made Himself one of a crowd of obscure penitents, feeling in His pitiful sympathy and generous chivalry as if their sin were His ; and in that very moment heaven opened before His dazzled eyes, and a Spirit came forth from the Eternal Presence, and saluted Him as the Beloved Son. He had laid Himself and His life at the feet of the Righteous Judge ; and Infinite Holiness had set upon Him the seal of its approval, “In Thee I am well pleased” : He had humbled Himself under the mighty hand of God, and had been lifted up.

THE TEMPTATION, i. 12, 13

"And forthwith the Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness ; and He was in the wilderness forty days." Jesus would interpret what had befallen Him by what He had heard of the ancient prophets ; the Spirit of God had taken possession of Him. But to what end ? What were to be His mission and His message ? He must be alone to think it all out ; He must wrestle with the Spirit that had come upon Him, as Jacob had wrestled with the angel through the night by the Jabbok. Not even John could help Him.

He separated Himself from the crowd, and went out into the wilderness that He might become better acquainted with the Spirit of God ; and He found Satan the Tempter. The inevitable reaction followed on the moments of inspired exaltation. After all He was a man, no mere visionary ascetic. His brain was alive with a sense of penetrating insight ; His nerves were tingling with the consciousness of power. Life beckoned to Him with inviting hands, and called Him with

seductive voices. The greatest careers lay open before Him.

Then with a violent revulsion, a horror as of thick darkness settled down upon His soul at the thought that visions of earthly pleasure, power, and fame had occupied, even for a moment, the mind of Him who was the Beloved Son of God, in whom God was well pleased.

For a while, perhaps throughout the forty days, the struggle went on between spiritual exaltation and spiritual depression, till at last the tide of feeling was spent; human nature asserted itself; the preoccupation with the inner life vanished, and Jesus awoke to see things in the light of common day. He found Himself alone in the wilderness, His only companions the wild animals of the desert. He seemed to Himself an ordinary man, lonely, faint, and hungry; the spiritual exaltation and the spiritual depression seemed passing moods that had no permanent meaning for His life; the Divine Spirit and the Tempting Devil seemed mere phantasms of a dream.

But "the angels ministered unto Him":

10 ANTECEDENTS TO MINISTRY [i. 1-13]

help came to the weary body and the over-wrought spirit: food, rest, wise and loving counsel. Jesus was once more master of Himself: He knew that the experiences of the Baptism were real, that the vision and the voice had brought a true message of God to His soul; that the other earthly visions were such as might well stir a man's ambition; but that He was called with a higher calling.

CHAPTER II

EARLY MINISTRY—GATHERING OF DISCIPLES—
OPPOSITION TO PHARISAIC LEGALISM

i. 14—iii. 19

THE BEGINNING OF THE MINISTRY

i. 14, 15

WE do not read of any immediate sequel to the Baptism and the Temptation. Jesus waited, we do not know how long, or where, or with whom. He did not go home; He could not go back and live the old life as if nothing had happened; neither could He appear again amongst His brothers and sisters and say, “I have had a revelation that I am the Beloved Son of God.” It was hopeless to try and make them understand His experience; as yet He Himself only partly understood it. Perhaps He went back to John and became for the time being his disciple.

Then John was “delivered up,” betrayed, and thrown into prison; a natural answer to the call to repentance, the “ethical demand,” as we should say in modern times. His disciples scattered, and Jesus returned to His native province, preaching the good news of God. He had seen in the imprisonment of John a call to begin His ministry. The message concerning repentance and forgiveness had hitherto been delivered by a “voice crying in the wilderness”; men had to leave their homes and make a journey to hear it. The voice was silenced, but the new Teacher brought the message into the towns and villages. Men could stand at their house-doors and listen; they could hear it at the Sabbath service of the synagogue. It was still the same call “repent”; but it had become more than a mere call to repentance and offer of forgiveness. Jesus proclaimed the good news of God; the appointed time had come, and the Kingdom of God was at hand. Such words in the mouth of a Jew speaking to Jews could mean only one thing. “The appointed time” was that spoken of

by the prophets, the time when God would deliver Israel ; the "Kingdom of God" was the new dispensation of righteousness and prosperity. The hope of Israel took many forms ; usually the Messiah, the Saviour, Conqueror and King was a prominent figure ; but the preaching of Jesus, so far, said nothing about the Messiah ; the watch-word of the good news was the Kingdom of God, following the teaching of those who hoped that God Himself would intervene directly to redeem His people, and to establish the new order. How had the assurance come to Jesus that the Kingdom of God was at hand ? All Jewry had been stirred by the preaching of John ; Jesus had felt Himself possessed and moved by the Spirit to some great end ; and He had seen the apparent triumph of evil in the imprisonment of the preacher of righteousness. In some moment of inspiration like that which followed His baptism, the conviction seized and held Him that these were the signs of the coming of the Kingdom. He knew now to what mission he had been called ; He was to preach the Kingdom of God. One article

of the preaching was faith; men were to believe the good news.

THE CALLING OF THE FIRST DISCIPLES

i. 16-20

He had come into Galilee, but He still avoided Nazareth, and made His way to the Sea of Galilee, and there, walking by the lake, He saw fishermen fishing or mending their nets. He bade them follow Him, and He would make them fishers of men. He reveals Himself as a born leader of men, conscious of the right and power to command; instinctively He strikes the note of authority. And, as mostly happens when that note is struck by the born leader, the men obeyed.

Probably He had known them before in a familiarity which had not bred contempt. Thus from His friends we learn His social standing. These men, Simon and Andrew, James and John, belonged to the lower middle-class. They were working owners of fishing-boats; James and John had a father living] who still worked at the fishing, and

employed men to help him. It was an occupation which gave full play to many qualities of body and mind — courage, industry, intelligence, and so forth. These masters of fishing-smacks had to contend with the treacherous moods of the inland sea in order to win their fish ; and when they came to sell them they had to match themselves against the wily Greek or Syrian trader.

They were called that they might become fishers of men. The new Leader, it seems, had the gift of holy epigram ; He could speak truths that went home to the hearers' hearts in half a dozen words, such as

Men remember
Till they forget themselves.

The new disciples understood once for all that the energy, persistence, and dexterity which had swept fish into their nets by hundreds were to be used to gather multitudes into the kingdom.

THE PREACHING IN CAPERNAUM, i. 21-28

Then the Man of Nazareth and His four fishermen went into the nearest town to

inaugurate the new dispensation. The sentence might have been written then by a scribe of the Pharisees in contemptuous sarcasm; and it is the greatest marvel in the world's history that the words can be used now as a simple statement of actual fact. The town was Capernaum on the north-west shore of the Sea of Galilee, a busy place where there were great shoals of human fish. The Sabbath came—perhaps it began the very evening on which Jesus arrived—and He went to the service at the synagogue. There, as He knew, He would have an opportunity of delivering His message. Judaism did not try to limit the Spirit by silencing all except an official class of preachers; but any one who had a word of exhortation for the people was invited to speak. Jesus, therefore, delivered His message. We are not told what He said; the message probably did not specially interest the audience. It is one of the troubles of the true prophet that his hearers think about the man and not about the message; they are taken up with the delivery, the

anecdotes, and the illustrations, and care little about the teaching. The one thing that men remembered about this sermon was the air of authority with which Jesus spoke, the contrast between Him and the scribes. If a scribe had preached about the coming of the Kingdom, he would have quoted the dictum of Rabbi A, who had made a calculation based on the figures in Daniel, and compared it with Rabbi B's explanation of the seventy years of Jeremiah ; the scribe would further have given the comments on these views which Rabbi C said he had heard from Rabbi D in the name of Rabbi E ; and so on through a whole alphabet of learned authorities. Jesus said simply, as His own certain knowledge, that the appointed time had come, and the Kingdom was at hand. He seemed quite sure about it, and made His hearers feel as if He really knew, and the audience were astonished.

Then there came an interruption ; there was present a man with an unclean spirit. Probably he was harmless and inoffensive under ordinary circumstances, the common-

place routine of the synagogue service made no impression on him. But the new authoritative voice excited the demoniac, and brought on a crisis of his malady. The speaker and congregation were startled by a wild cry, "Why dost Thou meddle with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Didst Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee; Thou art the Holy One of God!" Again the impression which was made and remembered had to do with the man and not with the teaching. Here was another challenge from the powers of Darkness; the Temptation had followed the Baptism, then John had been imprisoned, and now Satan confronted Jesus at the outset of His ministry. "Let the Saint of God talk with His fellow-saints about the Kingdom of God, but let Him not meddle with lost souls possessed by evil spirits; these belonged to the kingdom of Satan." There would be a pause in the address, a hush of expectation in the audience. Then Jesus rebuked him, "Hold thy peace, and come out of him." Torn asunder by the contending forces the victim writhed and shrieked in his convulsions. At

last peace came with exhaustion ; the devil had departed, and the man was in his right mind. Even before this, Jesus' manner of speech in His teaching had revealed His personality ; now for the moment, at any rate, this victory over the demon seemed a full confirmation of His authority. An excited throng streamed out of the synagogue, eagerly comparing notes about the "new teaching" with its unaccustomed note of "authority" ; and before the Sabbath was over all Capernaum had heard of Jesus the prophet and worker of miracles, and the news began to spread to the neighbouring towns and villages.

THE HEALER, i. 29-34

We now learn that two of the disciples, Simon and Andrew, had a house in Capernaum, and that Jesus returned thither with James and John after the scene in the synagogue. Simon, it seems, was married, and his mother-in-law helped his wife to keep house. Jesus may have been a visitor there before, and have found a sympathy which He missed in His own home ; but

on this Sabbath the mother-in-law lay restless with fever, distressed that she could not entertain her friend. She heard her kinsfolk come home from the synagogue, and perhaps noticed some unusual excitement. Then they came to her room, and Jesus entered, and they followed Him. His very presence was always a healing balm and a refreshing cordial, but now as she looked up she saw a new light in His eyes, and wondered at an unwonted air of power, force, and authority. He came to her and took her hand, and she felt stronger, and moved as if to sit up ; He raised her, and the fever passed away, and she was herself again. Forthwith she went to take her share in preparing the evening meal.

But the excitements of the day were not yet over, for there were other demoniacs in Capernaum besides the one who had been healed in the synagogue ; and others besides Peter's wife's mother were ill. Loving care for these sufferers would be reinforced by the universal appetite for the marvellous ; for a while, however, both were checked by the law of the Sabbath. But when the sun set, a

crowd gathered round Simon's house, bringing all the sick and all the demoniacs in the town, and the rest of the inhabitants came to look on. Such, at any rate, was the impression made upon Jesus and His friends when their quiet evening was broken in upon by the cries of the eager throng. Jesus came forth to meet these new demands ; the sun had set, and the brief twilight soon faded into darkness, relieved, perhaps, by the uncertain illumination of torches, or the cold, weird light of the moon. Again Jesus proved Himself master of disease and demoniac possession — “many” were healed ; not all ; some went away disappointed. Perhaps they had not faith ; or Jesus' powers failed Him as time went on ; and some may have despaired of getting their turn that night. “To-morrow,” they may have said to each other as they turned homeward, “to-morrow we will come again, and our turn will come” ; or “To-morrow the Prophet will have recruited His energy and will be able to heal our friends.”

This time Jesus gave an added proof of His power over demons. The demoniac in

the synagogue had saluted Him as “the Holy One of God”—a dangerous title in a country which swarmed with fanatics looking for a Messiah to lead them against the Romans and their henchmen the Herods. Perhaps, too, at this stage of His career, the reader might suppose Jesus shrank from the suggestion that He was the Messiah as from a blasphemy. Now, therefore, He silenced the demoniacs lest they should again suggest that He was the Messiah.

THE PREACHING IN GALILEE, i. 35-39

The events just narrated involved a crisis in the spiritual life of Jesus almost as important as the Baptism or the Temptation. He had discovered His powers of healing, perhaps also their limitation. What was their meaning in relation to His mission? The question was not easy to answer. For, on the one hand, the professional exorcist and wonder-worker was well known and little respected, and a reputation for miraculous powers might embarrass Jesus. John the Baptist wrought no miracles; but, on the other hand, these

mighty works relieved suffering and attracted hearers. After the Baptism He had sought solitude in the wilderness, and now He again needed to consider His life in undisturbed fellowship with God. Therefore early next day, before dawn, while His friends were still sleeping, He left the town, and found some lonely place, and gave Himself up to prayer.

But when his friends rose in the morning, and before they thought of disturbing Him, the bearers of sick folk began to beset the house. There would be some who had come the night before, but had missed their chance, and others who had not heard of Jesus till it was too late, so that they put off coming till the morning. Perhaps it was the arrival of a would-be patient that sent the disciples to look for Jesus. Simon went eagerly to call his Master to fresh marvellous works, and lo! the Master was not there. Simon looked for him hurriedly in the house, and then had to meet the applicants with a blank face, and tell them that he could not find Jesus. Then the crowd dispersed through the town to look for Him, but to no purpose.

At last the disciples hunted Him down in His retreat. "Every one is looking for you," they cried, overjoyed at having found Him, eager to take Him back at once to Capernaum, that He might work more miracles, and continue His triumphant career. But their high spirits received a severe check; Jesus would not go back to Capernaum.

"Let us go elsewhere," He replied; "to the neighbouring villages, that I may preach there also, for My mission is to preach."

Through His communing with God He had learnt that His mission was not to work miracles, but to declare the Kingdom of God; that He was first and foremost a Healer of souls. There was danger lest the beginning He had made at Capernaum should be marred by His reputation as a wonder-worker; therefore, without hesitation, He sacrificed His newly-won popularity, and quenched the enthusiasm of His followers. Whether the crestfallen disciples consented to accompany Him we do not know, we hear nothing more of them till after Jesus returned to Capernaum; but the Master Himself

wandered from one Galilean synagogue to another delivering His message, confronted again and again by demoniacs, from whom He drove out the demons ; but there were no other healings—with one exception.

THE LEPER, i. 40-45

The narrative of St Mark suggests by its silence that at this period Jesus refused to heal the sick ; but the importunity of one suppliant overcame His reluctance : a leper begged for cleansing.

“ If Thou wilt, Thou canst cleanse me.” The leper had heard that Jesus had refused to heal, but he believed that it was the will and not the power that was lacking ; hence the words, “ If Thou wilt.” The suggestion that He was unwilling to relieve suffering touched Jesus to the quick, and overbore for the moment the interests of the Kingdom, and the social and religious decorum of the times. Jesus put out his hand and *touched* the leper, and the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. But this impulsive act of generosity seems to

have been followed by something like a revulsion of feeling; the cleansing of this leper would encourage others to resort to Him, so that He would again be hindered in His work. Jesus tried in vain to guard against such consequences by sending the man away at once with strict orders to tell no one. Let him leave Galilee, and go away to the Temple at Jerusalem, and there fulfil the ritual observance appointed for the cleansing of a leper. But even the authority which had silenced demons could not keep the man quiet; he told the story everywhere, and the people supposed that Jesus was now willing to heal anybody and everybody. Had He not *touched* a leper? When He tried to go into a town He found Himself hemmed in by a crowd too eager for healing of sick bodies to care for any ministry to sinful souls, so that He was compelled to imitate John and become a voice in the wilderness; and there the people flocked to Him as they had done to John; but the crowds were thinking more of wondrous works than of repentance and forgiveness.

THE PARALYTIC, ii. 1-12.

After some time Jesus ventured back again to Capernaum, and again probably made His home in Simon's house, and the people crowded in, and He preached to them. He had succeeded at last in making them understand that they must accept Him as a Teacher, and not chiefly as a Healer and Wonder-worker ; He still wrought cures from time to time, but on the whole He succeeded in protecting His ministry from endless importunity. That He could do so without losing His hold on the people is a most convincing proof of the unique force of His personality. The following incident illustrates the changed conditions.

Instead of a crowd of sick folk a single paralytic found access to Jesus only through the persistence of his friends. In the present state of our information we cannot understand all the details, but the main facts are clear. Jesus sat teaching in a large room, from which He could be seen and heard from outside ; a crowd had gathered outside, and the room

was full except for a space in front of the Teacher. Four men carrying a paralytic, in default of the ordinary means of access, managed somehow to let down their burden through the roof, and thus place him before Jesus. Such persistence showed implicit confidence, both in the power and in the goodwill of Jesus; and the audience wondered what response He would make, whether He would rebuke the intrusion, or utter some word of power, and heal the sufferer.

"Son," He said, "thy sins be forgiven thee." To a modern audience, and probably to many of those then present, these words would sound like an evasion of the demand for a miracle. The carnal mind would think that an offer of forgiveness to such a sufferer was mere mockery; but Jesus placed in the forefront that which was most important to Him, and also, doubtless, to the sufferer; His inspired insight had discerned that the paralytic craved healing for his soul as well as for his body.

But the gathering included critical theologians, for Jesus' doings had attracted the

notice of the Jewish clergy ; and there were scribes present to whom His words were blasphemy. In professing to forgive sins, He was usurping a prerogative of God Himself. Jesus read their thoughts, and answered them by word and deed ; and in this answer He dealt with other thoughts, too, which have not been recorded.

“ Why reason ye thus in your hearts ? Is it easier to say to the paralytic, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise, take up thy rug and walk ? ”

“ That,” said many of His hearers to themselves, “ is the very question we were asking ourselves.”

But Jesus continued, with a change of tone, which again roused the expectations of His hearers :—

“ But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins.”

Then He turned to the paralytic :—

“ I bid thee arise, take up thy bed, and go home.”

A shock of new life throbbed through the half-dead body of the paralytic, and he rose

up before them all, took up his rug, and went out ; and they were all astonished, and glorified God.

We do not know why Jesus called Himself the Son of Man ; the phrase sounds like a contrast to the demoniac's "Holy One of God." But this assumption of a distinct title shows that Jesus had been meditating on His position. What was He? How was He to answer questions as to Himself and His mission ? He chose a title which, whatever else it might mean, marked Him off from all other teachers, and claimed for Him a special position of His own. Moreover, this incident lays renewed emphasis on the fact that the work of Jesus centred in forgiveness—atonement. It also marks a new development, Jesus recognises His powers of healing as an assurance of His divine mission, and a public credential of His authority.

THE TAX-GATHERER, ii. 13-17

During this second visit to Capernaum there was another calling of a disciple sufficiently remarkable to be described in

some detail, because the new disciple was neither religious¹ nor respectable, and because this was the very reason why Jesus called him. Up to a certain point the circumstances remind us of the call of the first four disciples. Jesus was again walking by the lake; again He saw a man busy with his regular work, and bade the man follow Him, and the command was promptly obeyed. This disciple, too, was of the lower middle class, a tax-gatherer or revenue officer in charge of a local branch of the customs. Such men are usually obnoxious on account of their profession, and in Palestine they served the unpopular Herods; many of the class made their office an opportunity for cruel extortion. Their work, too, brought them into close contact with men and things of all sorts, so that they could not observe the laws as to ceremonial cleanliness; and yet Jesus invited one of these men to become His disciple, follower, and friend. The new disciple's name is given as Levi ben Alphaeus.

Levi did not separate himself from his own

¹ In the current sense of the term.

class when he became a disciple. We hear next of a great gathering at a meal, perhaps in Levi's house, perhaps in that of Jesus, at which many of His disciples were present, and also many tax-gatherers and "sinners"; and Jesus actually ate with these, who were unclean. The piety of orthodox Jews was far more astounded than we should be if we saw a revival preacher taking a pipe and pot of beer at a public-house in amicable conversation with the regular customers. The scribes of the Pharisees gasped out their indignant surprise, "He is eating with tax-gatherers and sinners!" Jesus heard, and replied that He did so of set purpose: "The healthy do not need a physician, but those who are sick: I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

This is the clue to the calling of Levi; he was made a disciple, not in spite of, but because of, his disreputable social, and religious standing — amongst other reasons. Jesus had associated Himself with sinners in seeking baptism from John; He had taken up John's message of repentance and forgive-

ness; and He had made forgiveness the prelude to His greatest work of healing. His mission was to sinners, therefore He had amongst His disciples a tax-gatherer, one of the lapsed masses of His time, who could help Him to approach them, and so gain their confidence.

For these "sinners" were not exclusively, or even chiefly, criminal or immoral, but rather corresponded to our lapsed masses, many of whom live in suburban villas. They were Jews who were not "good" Jews, in a stronger sense than that in which many Englishmen are not good "Churchmen." They were careless alike of the ritual and of the moral demands of the Law, and thus seemed both to themselves and to others shut out from any religious life. Moreover, as the religion of Israel was an essential feature of patriotism, they were further degraded by being shut out from the highest ideals and aspirations of the national life. Such twofold exclusion implied loss of self-respect, and of moral stimulus, so that these sinners would share the lax morality of those who have

lapsed from the control of patriotic and religious public opinion.

But Jesus, setting about the work of founding the Kingdom of God, appealed specially to this class. We read that, even before He called Levi, His growing influence was shown by the many disciples who followed Him, and these already included “sinners.” A class conscious of the unfavourable judgment of public opinion, and half inclined to believe that the condemnation was just, might be ready to listen to a message of repentance and forgiveness.

THE BRIDEGROOM, ii. 18-20

Jesus further outraged Jewish orthodoxy by neglecting the religious exercise of fasting, even while it was being observed by the disciples of His old master—John. His reason for this neglect throws a flood of light upon His thoughts at this time concerning Himself and His work.

“Why,” said He, “should His disciples fast while the *Bridegroom* was with them?”

He called His message the Good News; He rejoiced in His power to heal body and

soul, so that He could think of Himself as the Bridegroom, the happy occasion of gladness to all about Him ; His disciples were the Bridegroom's friends, who shared His joy. Fasting is not a usual feature of wedding celebrations. In time, indeed, the marriage feast would end, the Bridegroom and His friends would separate, and life would fall back into everyday routine, in which fasting might find a place ; but these were the great days of the inauguration of a new dispensation. The promise of the Kingdom seemed near and bright ; the spirit thereof was abroad upon the earth, and in God's own time would take to itself such a body, such outward form, as He willed ; and Jesus, God's beloved Son, Son of Man, Good Physician, Bridegroom, was to be the great agent of its coming.

NEW WINE, ii. 21-28

This incident as to fasting is another illustration of the attitude of Jesus towards the popular religion. He had already healed on the Sabbath ; had touched a leper ; had professed to forgive sins ; had called a tax-gath-

erer to be a disciple; and had eaten with sinners. Now He neglected fasting; in the sequel we shall see that He persistently broke the Sabbath.¹ In His overflowing confidence and energy He did not hesitate to affront the popular religious leaders at every turn. This policy is formulated in the sayings about the new patch, and the new wine-skins, and is further illustrated by the incident of the plucking of the ears of corn on the Sabbath. "The old garment," said Jesus, "could not be mended with a patch of new cloth, and the new wine could not be put into old bottles; it would burst them." The traditions of the scribes could not be the laws of the Kingdom, and the Spirit which descended upon Jesus at His Baptism was too mighty to be confined within the narrow limits of Pharisaic Judaism. Jesus made it clear with the utmost frankness that He could not be either a follower or an ally of the scribes. The prominent feature of their religion was a multiplicity of ceremonial observances; the essentials of the faith of the Kingdom were to do justice, and love mercy,

¹ According to the views of the Pharisees.

and walk humbly with God. Jesus did not try to combine the two ; the free spiritual life must be substituted for the bondage of tradition.

The incident of the plucking of the ears of corn gave Jesus an opportunity of stating His views of the Sabbath. He and His disciples were taking a walk through the corn-fields on the Sabbath, and the disciples began to pluck the ears of corn. Some Pharisees who were present regarded this as a breach of the Sabbath, and remonstrated with Jesus. He replied by citing a case from the Old Testament to show that ritual ordinances were not absolutely binding, but might be set aside in the interests of humanity. According to the law, only priests might eat the show-bread, but when David and his companions needed food, the high priest gave them the show-bread ; so, too, the laws of the Sabbath need not be observed in all their strictness when men were hungry and needed food. "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath"; and the Son of Man was Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus, there-

fore, was quite prepared to set His authority against that of the scribes as to the way in which the Sabbath should be kept.

In this connection we must refer to a previous incident. When Jesus cleansed the leper He sent him to Jerusalem to fulfil the legal ritual. But we must remember that the Jerusalem priests belonged for the most part to the Sadducees, the conservative party of aristocratic ecclesiastical officials, who were opposed to the Pharisees. The position of Jesus resembled that of many great religious leaders. He found revealed religion corrupted; the Pharisees, the most active and fervent religious party, held a corrupt form of the true faith with intolerable fanaticism, and claimed that the corruption was the only true form of the religion of Israel, or, to use a modern term, the only true orthodoxy. Jesus repudiated much of the popular Pharisaism, yet His teaching really represented the ancient faith of Israel. The true successor of the Old Testament was not the system of the Pharisees which elaborated the literal phrasing of its formulæ and ordinances, but

the message of Jesus which made the Old Testament a stepping-stone to larger truths and a higher life. Like many other teachers in a similar position, Jesus desired to remain within the ancient religious organisation, and to obtain the recognition of its official heads. We may use one or two modern illustrations, on the understanding that the application is to be strictly limited to the one point, the desire of a religious leader to be loyal to the officials and organisations of his Church, although he is at variance with the form of it which is popularly regarded as orthodox. From one point of view the position of Jesus might be compared to that of John Wesley, and from another to that of an opponent of popular ritualism appealing to the Anglican bishops.

THE MAN WITH THE WITHERED HAND

iii. 1-6

The sayings of Jesus as to the plucking of the ears of corn show that He was not merely a mystic or a popular orator, but a careful thinker and skilful in dialectic. He acted on

rational principles, and could justify Himself to inquirers, critics, or opponents. They also bring out another fact which is still more forcibly illustrated by the present incident: although Jesus was attacking the tenets of the Pharisees, He thought He might convert them to His views, and subdue them to His authority.

It was already clear that Jesus was an enemy of the Law as it was interpreted by tradition; but, in order that they might take action against Him with the assurance of success, the Pharisees needed convincing evidence of some notable breach of the Law on His part. Accordingly, they chose a Sabbath when Jesus would be in the synagogue, and arranged that there should be present a man with a withered hand; they themselves also attended to see what Jesus would do. It was a public challenge, which shows how completely Jesus was understood to have committed Himself to lax views on the Sabbath. There was no urgency about a withered hand that seemed to call for a relaxation of law. Probably, under ordinary circumstances, Jesus

would not have chosen the day of rest for healing this man. But now the sufferer might cherish hopes of immediate relief, and Jesus would not disappoint him. Moreover, if He had declined the challenge, He would have seemed to endorse the authority of the Pharisaic tradition, and He was more concerned to break the bondage of ritual than to draw fine distinctions as to what might or might not be done on the Sabbath. Accordingly, He bade the man stand forth, and turned to the scribes, and said: "Is it right on the Sabbath to confer a benefit or to inflict an injury, to save life or to kill?"

His critics were silent; the synagogue was crowded with devoted followers of Jesus, and it is waste of breath to argue with a popular hero surrounded by his admirers. He looked round on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, astonished and grieved to the point of anger that there should be men so callous as to set the exact observance of a ceremonial law above the happiness, even for a few hours, of a fellow-creature. But this was not all;

Jesus would hardly have been so astounded at the familiar callousness of fanatics. His words were a personal appeal, tender with chivalrous sympathy, burning with righteous enthusiasm, and energised by the indwelling Spirit of God ; and against all these the scribes had hardened their hearts.

The Pharisees had made their challenge ; Jesus had replied by His appeal ; and this had been rejected. So, without further delay, Jesus accepted the challenge ; He bade the man stretch forth the withered hand, and as He did so it became natural like the other. The Pharisees were satisfied ; they had an overt act of disobedience to the Law, committed in the presence of many witnesses, and forthwith they went out to consider how they might use this advantage. They now called to their councils a party of whom we read for the first time, the Herodians, or partisans of the Herods. Usually the Pharisees and the Herods were at variance with each other ; but by this time the influence of Jesus in Galilee was a danger to the government, and the Herodians were ready to ally them-

selves with the Pharisees against the common enemy.

THE GROWING INFLUENCE OF JESUS, iii. 7-12

To avoid the dangers threatened by this alliance, Jesus and His disciples left the town and withdrew to the shores of the lake. The next few verses give a brief account of the influence and activity of Jesus; crowds flocked to Him, not only from Galilee, but also from Judæa and Jerusalem, from Idumæa, from the regions east of the Jordan, and from the territory of Tyre and Sidon. The great attraction was His gift of healing. The sick and the demoniacs "fell upon Him," hustled and jostled Him, so that in order to continue His teaching, He was obliged to address the crowds from a boat on the lake at a little distance from the shore. The demoniacs continually hailed Him as *the Son of God*, in spite of constant attempts to silence them.

THE CALLING OF THE TWELVE, iii. 13-19

The success of Jesus involved Him in many difficulties; the hatred of His enemies was

rendered more violent, and He was hampered by the inconvenient importunity of His admirers. The multitudes that constantly gathered round Him and followed Him were a danger to public order, and a hindrance to the preaching of the Kingdom. Jesus now sought to lessen this embarrassment, and at the same time to provide for more effective preaching on a larger scale. He had already specially called five disciples ; He now chose twelve, to whom He gave the special name of apostles ; they were to follow Him, and also at times to go forth and preach and cast out demons. No doubt, at the same time, Jesus dismissed His miscellaneous followers to their homes, there to live according to His teaching, and to be ready to obey any further instructions they might receive from Him. His personal following, indeed, would not be always limited to the twelve, nor would all the twelve always be with Him ; fresh crowds gathered from time to time. But the twelve were the official representatives of the Kingdom ; they limited the responsibility of Jesus, and enabled Him to promulgate definite teaching.

The list includes the four fishermen who were first called, and, although the tax-gatherer Apostle is not mentioned as Levi, we should naturally suppose, even without any additional information, that he is present in the list under another name. Of the four original disciples, three receive new names, partly to mark the solemnity of their vocation, partly to distinguish them from new members of the brotherhood who bore the same names. Simon was surnamed Peter, *petros*, "rock," in token, as we should suppose, of his strength, firmness, and determination, and to distinguish him from another Simon, the Canaanean or Zealot, one of a class of patriotic fanatics eager to peril life and liberty for Israel and the Law. The sons of Zebedee, James and John, were surnamed Boanerges, which, according to St Mark, means "Sons of Thunder," perhaps men of a fiery and impetuous spirit, endowed with the eloquence natural to their character. The original four stand at the head of the list, and, first of all, Peter; but his brother Andrew is placed fourth; clearly he was less important than

James and John, whose names intervene. Last of all comes Judas, the Man of Kerioth, branded as the Traitor, but as yet no shadow of coming treachery had fallen upon the mind of Judas, or of his fellow-Apostles, or of his Master.

THE GALILEAN WOMEN, xv. 41

We are told next to nothing of the ways and means of this little society, how they found food, clothing, and shelter. In the East, with its warm climate and ready hospitality, these are more easily come by than with us. Long afterwards we read of certain women who accompanied Jesus and ministered to His wants; when they first joined the company, and how constantly they were with Him, we do not know. One of them was Mary, the mother of two of the Apostles—James the Less and Joses; and others probably belonged to the families of disciples.

CHAPTER III

ATTEMPTS TO SILENCE JESUS

iii. 20-35

UP to this point St Mark's brief notes give the impression of uninterrupted success ; hindrances had indeed arisen, but they had been quietly and effectively overcome ; and they had been chiefly due to His reputation as a healer and His extraordinary popularity. But these had neither bewildered nor intoxicated Him, and He had persevered in His true work as a spiritual leader and teacher. Almost from the outset, however, He had been influenced by the opposition of the Pharisees. Left to Himself He would rather have preached a positive righteousness than have denounced the Pharisaic traditions ; but the hostility of the scribes led him to emphasise the incompatibility of the doctrine of salvation by ceremonies with the truths of

the Kingdom. As St Mark continues his story, it is clear that the work of Jesus was more and more shaped by the forces that resisted Him, so that He comes to be not so much a leader as a champion of righteousness involved in a mortal struggle with evil.

Some time since we left the Pharisees discussing with the Herodians how Jesus' violation of the sanctity of the Sabbath might be used to ruin Him. They had expected the people to be as shocked as they were themselves, but His commanding influence remained unshaken, and He could only have been arrested by a military force, and the Herodian officials were not likely to take much trouble or run any risks for the sake of the Pharisees or the Sabbath. Some other means had to be found of dealing with Jesus. The following paragraphs describe the efforts of the Pharisees.

They seem to have had recourse in the first instance to the family of Jesus. The family in the ancient East, as in modern France, exercised considerable authority over its members; and the family meant more than mother

and father and children. There would be uncles and cousins from whom the widowed Mary and her sons would be expected to seek counsel, and to whom they owed a certain deference. To these heads of the family would come the Pharisees with stories of the way in which Jesus was disgracing Himself and His family by flagrant defiance of the Law. His friends would find it hard to believe such tales ; they would reply that till He left home His life had been exemplary and devout. When they were convinced by overwhelming evidence, they would agree with the scribes that there could be only one explanation of such behaviour on the part of so good a man —Jesus had gone mad. Primitive people regard madness as a sign of inspiration ; a somewhat more advanced society converts the proposition, and sees in inspiration a symptom of mental aberration. Finally, His friends thought they had a decisive proof of insanity when they heard that He was so occupied with the crowds of patients and disciples that He neglected to take food. So the friends of Jesus set out to take charge of Him, and

protect Him from the consequences of His madness. It is not clear whether St Mark leaves us to assume that they failed, and that Mary and her sons afterwards made a second separate attempt to lay hold of Jesus; or whether the action of Mary was the only effort of the family to effect their purpose. To those who have no prejudices in favour of the Law, it is difficult to understand how anyone could ever have thought Jesus mad; in the narrative He appears throughout as sane, sober, and serene.

Meanwhile the scribes were busy on their own account; they pervaded the crowds, and whispered a suggestion of insanity in an uglier form. The local clergy, to use a modern term, had called to their aid some ecclesiastics from the capital, scribes from Jerusalem. These experts were told that Jesus claimed to be inspired by the Spirit of God.

"Doubtless," said they, "He is possessed by a spirit, but it is an unclean spirit, a devil. He has made a compact with Beelzebub, the Prince of the Devils, to overthrow the Law, and that He may do so, Beelzebub allows Him

to cast out devils, so that He may seem to be a benevolent prophet of God, and be able to pervert the minds of men."

These charges were repeated to Jesus, and He called His accusers to Him.

"How," said He, "can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand; and if a household be divided against itself, that household cannot stand; and if Satan makes war upon himself, he cannot stand. No one can go into a strong man's house and spoil his goods without first binding the strong man."

The devil would surely have found some better way of aiding a heretic propaganda than by bringing shame and confusion and defeat on his subordinate demons.

When Jesus turned His thoughts to the moral aspect of their conduct He was moved to indignation, as when the scribes rejected His appeal for a humane interpretation of the rules for the Sabbath. Now, their slander was not only foolish, but wicked. In their zeal for what they considered orthodoxy they had committed the unpardonable sin; because

Jesus differed from them on details of external observance, they had declared that the divine was devilish, and that the Holy Spirit which had descended upon Him from Heaven was Beelzebub, the foulest of demons from the lowest hell. All other sins and blasphemies might be forgiven, but this sin could not be pardoned ; it was an eternal sin, and indeed it has never yet been stamped out ; it cannot be forgiven, because the sinners who are guilty of it think that they are just men who need no repentance.

When Jesus had confounded these scribes, He had to meet another and even more distressing attempt to silence Him. These episodes suggest in a curious remote fashion the successive deputations to Coriolanus, perhaps because here also the last effort to move Jesus from His purpose was made by His mother. She was probably instigated and directed by the Pharisees, for we seem to see here also the same malignant ingenuity that charged Him with being possessed by a devil. Surely His mother, left to herself, would have tried to see her son in private ; as it was,

the incident was planned to be much more dramatic. He was sitting teaching, surrounded by a crowded audience, and His mother and brothers sent Him a message to come to them. To her He was still the lad who was to be amenable to her authority, and her attitude was that of an offended parent to an erring son. The message was brought to Him. Obedience would only have led to a painful scene, and with His usual prompt decisiveness He quietly put the interruption on one side, and went on with His teaching. The aphorism with which He replied to the message was a justification as well as a refusal, not a mere expedient for the special occasion, but the statement of a permanent principle. He looked round on the circle of disciples and said :—

“Behold my mother and my brother : whosoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

CHAPTER IV

TEACHING BY PARABLES

iv. 1-34

THE previous sections of the Gospel have been concerned with the gifts, the character, the work of Jesus, rather than His teaching. We have been told that His marvellous powers of healing drew crowds after Him everywhere, and that His discourses were so remarkable that the people listened even when He did not work miracles. His influence in Galilee had become a source of anxiety to the supporters of the government. Something, indeed, has been partly stated, partly implied as to His teaching ; He had announced the imminence of a new dispensation, the Kingdom of God, but we have been told nothing as to the nature of the Kingdom. We have, however, learnt that His teaching was ethical, a demand for repentance accompanied by a promise of forgiveness. Moreover He had

repudiated the current idea that external ceremonial observances were amongst the essentials of religion ; and He had been compelled to break with the representatives of popular orthodoxy, the scribes and Pharisees, and even with His own family.

St Mark now devotes a short section to some of the more remarkable sayings of Jesus as to the coming—not the nature—of the Kingdom. They were not all uttered on the same occasion, but they belong to what may be called the second stage of the early ministry of Jesus by the Lake of Galilee near Capernaum. He was still a popular idol ; great multitudes pressed upon Him so closely that He was obliged to speak from a boat moored at a little distance from the shore.

At this time Jesus adopted a method of teaching by parables, figurative sayings or stories with a moral ; but to His public audiences He told only the stories and reserved the morals for the disciples. “ He did not speak to them without a parable, but in private He explained everything to His own disciples.” Amongst other things He

explained why He used this method : "It is given to you to know the secret truth concerning the Kingdom of God, but to those without it is all set forth in parables, that 'seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand, lest at any time they should turn and be forgiven.'" This reserve indicates a revulsion from the spontaneous enthusiasm of Jesus' first preaching. How quickly it came about we do not know, for the brevity of St Mark creates an impression of rapid movement which is partly illusory ; but probably a few weeks showed that the preaching of the Kingdom to the people was a failure. The audiences which crowded round Jesus were not seriously affected. They came as the Jews of old to Ezekiel, because Jesus was "unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument," and there was the added attraction that they might possibly witness a miracle. But there was no moral or spiritual reformation in Galilee ; these crowds were not the advance guard of the

Kingdom in its victorious coming. He was not encouraged in any way by this empty popularity, and His hopes turned to the inner circle of intimate disciples, so that the public ministry became a means of enlisting an occasional recruit, and His main work not so much preaching, but the training of preachers.

Hence, He Himself spoke in parables. The ancient East, even more than modern England, loved to take—or leave—its instruction in the form of proverb, apostrophe, fable, allegory, or anecdote, and no doubt this new feature in the teaching of Jesus added to His popularity, while the anger of the Pharisees would be touched with contempt when they saw the arch-heretic assume the character of professional story-teller. But to us it seems that the transparent and suggestive figures used in the parables would attract thoughtful, serious, and inquiring minds, and thus win for Jesus the kind of disciples He desired, while the careless crowd were merely amused. But the Gospel does not thus explain the use of this method. According to St Mark, Jesus

declared that He spoke in parables in order that His hearers might neither understand His meaning nor profit by His teaching. The Evangelist, in his matter-of-fact way, reports this saying without comment, and the record does not suggest any complete explanation, although various helpful ideas would occur to a sympathetic reader. In the first place, the saying is a quotation, probably current in some conventional sense, familiar to Jesus, to His hearers, and to St Mark, but quite unknown to us. Again, men use quotations for the sake of some one point bearing on the subject with which they are dealing, and cite the rest of a quotation merely for the sake of completeness, and without intending to apply all its literal meaning to present circumstances. Some help, too, is given by the parable of the Sower. Direct personal appeal to a miscellaneous audience, sowing on high roads, in thickets, and on thin layers of soil that half hid the underlying rock, secured numerous adherents, who might even obtain the experience of forgiveness. But, for the most part, such converts soon lapsed; some became

openly indifferent, while others injured the cause more deeply by continuing to be partisans when they had ceased to be disciples. Those who had passed through such an experience and fallen back to their old level, were further from the kingdom than they had been before. "For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance." Hence the wise husbandman would only sow in good ground which had been prepared for the seed ; the teaching in parables was a form of preparation in which the spiritual significance of the message was mercifully veiled from those to whom it would have been "a savour of death unto death."

The parables of this section, the Sower, the City on a Hill, the Lamp and the Bushel, the Seed Growing Secretly, and the Mustard Seed, reveal the mind of Jesus as to His early ministry and the future of the Kingdom.

SOWER, iv. 3-20

The first parable ran thus:—

“Behold the Sower went out to sow; and as he sowed, some fell by the wayside, and the birds came and ate it up. Other fell upon the rocky ground where there was not much soil, and because the soil was shallow it sprang up at once; but when the sun arose it was burnt up, and was withered for lack of root. Other fell into the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and there was no harvest. But others fell upon good soil, and sprang up and grew up and produced a harvest, and bore some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some an hundredfold.”

When Jesus had told this story, He left the people to find out the moral for themselves, “He that hath ears to hear,” said He, “let him hear.” But when He was alone again with the Twelve, it appeared that even these chosen and intimate followers did not know what lesson He had meant to teach. Perhaps they had talked it over amongst themselves, and came to Him to decide between rival

interpretations. It seemed strange to Jesus that they could not understand; to His own mind the teaching of the Sower was obvious. He had more difficult matters to set forth in figures and symbols. How, then, could He carry on their training if they stumbled on the very threshold of their initiation into the mysteries of the Kingdom. "Ye cannot understand this parable! How are you to understand all the other parables that I have to tell you."

Yet with His untiring patience, He explained Himself. The seed was the "Word," the message of the coming of the Kingdom; and the different soils were different classes of hearers. Thus the wayside represented hearers with whom the Word lay merely on the surface of their minds, so that Satan was able at once to snatch it away. Then the shallow soil above the rock represented hearers who readily and gladly received the message; people of quick, transient feelings, easily swayed one way or the other, surrendering their new faith under the stress of trouble or persecution as promptly and as readily as they

had received it. The ground spoiled by thorns, again, represented hearers in whose hearts the Word could only find narrow room amongst the interests and cares and excitements of business and pleasure, so that it failed to control the life. The good soil obviously stood for hearers who gave the Word a full, permanent and practical welcome, so that it shaped all their conduct and moulded their character.

In the Sower He recognises without bitterness or discouragement the comparative failure of indiscriminate preaching.

There had, indeed, been a measure of success, good ground which brought forth abundantly; but the figure of sowing used in three of these parables implies the limited usefulness of public preaching. Sowing is only effectual on certain soils under certain conditions, usually after careful and laborious preparation, and at the right season. Often the germination of the seed is only a beginning, which speedily comes to a disastrous end.

THE SEED GROWING SECRETLY, iv. 26-29

Another parable tells us of seed which a man sows in the ground. Then for a time he can do nothing more; nevertheless, whether he is sleeping by night or waking by day, the seed is sprouting and growing; he knows not how. Apart from any labour or skill of the husbandman, the ground produces a crop—first the blade, then the ear, then the full ear of ripe corn. Then when Nature has done her work—to use a modern phrase—the husbandman forthwith puts in the sickle, because the harvest is ready.

We are told, as we have already seen, that Jesus explained all His parables to His disciples; but the only explanation which is preserved is that of the Sower. In the case of the seed growing secretly and the rest, the interpretations once given seemed quite obvious and necessary; a written record could be dispensed with.

It is clear that this parable recognises that in the Kingdom, as in farming, human agency can effect little; the preacher may sow, but

he must leave the result to the working of heavenly powers upon the heart, and must allow such working its appointed time.

THE MUSTARD SEED, iv. 30-32

In another parable the coming of the Kingdom of God is likened to the growth of the mustard plant from its seed. A very small seed is sown, but the plant that springs from it becomes greater than any other herb, and puts forth great branches, so that the birds of heaven can roost under its branches. Here, certainly, the moral of a mighty development from a small beginning did not need to be made more explicit.

These parables also show how the hopes of Jesus centred in the inner circle of disciples. From them the Kingdom would grow; the seed in the good ground would multiply a hundredfold; the mustard seed would become a great tree. So far the real beginnings of the Kingdom were very small, but they were the earnest of a great future. Indeed, in spite of difficulties and delays, the Kingdom was

so real and present to Jesus, that He already foresaw the troubles which would follow its establishment. In the parable of the Sower, the birds of the air snatch up the seed from the wayside; but, in another parable, they lodge in the branches of the tree sprung from the mustard seed. When the powers of evil had failed to destroy the Kingdom, they would find an entrance into it, and fight against it from within. Obviously, an intimate acquaintance with the Twelve must have shown that the Kingdom, of which they were to be the heralds, could not be without blemish—Judas Iscariot was one of the number.

Some aphorisms recorded with the parables may have originated in His sense of the failings of His followers, and in His anxiety that the chosen few should rise to their opportunity and responsibility. “Take heed how ye hear; with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you, and more shall be given unto you.”

The parable of the Lamp and the Bushel implies that the private teaching to the dis-

ciples would not always be esoteric; Jesus was kindling, keeping alive, and cherishing a light which, at the right time, would be put on a stand and shine through the whole house. "There is nothing hid, but that it may be manifested; or made secret, but that it may come to light." The truth that for a moment was a secret between Jesus and His disciples, would one day be proclaimed throughout the world.

CHAPTER V

FURTHER MINISTRY OF TEACHING AND HEALING

iv. 35—vi. 6

THE STILLING OF THE STORM, iv. 35-41

UP to this point it has been possible to trace a certain progress in the narrative, in the revelation of the character of Jesus, and in the development of His work; now we have a series of incidents in which St Mark's intention is to illustrate the greatness of His miraculous gifts by instances surpassing any hitherto recorded. The first of these is the Stilling of the Storm.

At the close, as it seems, of a long day's teaching from a boat moored at a little distance from the land, Jesus did not land on the western coast and go home to Capernaum. He was too tired to run the gauntlet of the curious crowd with its importunity for miracles and deeds of healing; and He bade the dis-

ciples take Him across to the other side. The little voyage was a sudden inspiration ; no preparation had been made for it, and they took Him just as He was. Tired out, He lay down on a cushion in the stern and fell fast asleep.

All at once the lake was swept by one of those sudden storms which are common on inland waters surrounded by hills ; the waves beat over the boat, and it seemed as if it must sink ; but Jesus still slumbered in utter weariness ; and the disciples forgot Him, absorbed in their labour and their danger. At last they could do no more, and their thoughts turned to their Master. The whole Kingdom of God, the answer to the prayers of many generations, the fulfilment of the promises of God, the hope for the future of the world, was on board that fishing smack ; and the boat might be swamped at any moment. But the disciples were simply concerned for their own lives—what was the Kingdom of God to drowning men ? They were irritated by the contrast between their own terrified excitement and the serene repose of Jesus ; they aroused Him with a petulant, “ Master, carest

Thou not that we perish?" He woke, no doubt, to the vague confusion that follows the sudden termination of deep sleep; the wild scene broke upon Him; the tumult of winds and waves, the pitching and rolling of the boat, the incoherent cries of His disciples; but in a moment He was Master of Himself and His circumstances. "He arose and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, 'Peace, be still': and the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." To Him, with His imperturbable serenity in the face of such troubles, the terror of the disciples seemed strange. "Why," said He, "are ye so fearful? How is it that you have so little faith?"

THE DEMONIAC AMONG THE TOMBS, v. 1-20

We next read how Jesus landed in the district east of the lake, and met a demoniac among the tombs, and cast out devils from him. Like other demoniacs, the man saluted Him as the Messiah, the Son of God Most High. The incident is narrated on account of some special features; it was a signal victory

over the powers of evil, because the man was possessed by a legion—or, as we should say, by a whole army—of demons; and their presence, number, and malignity were shown by their passing from the man into a herd of swine, which forthwith ran headlong over a precipice into the lake, and were drowned. The chief result was that the people of the district were alarmed at the loss of their property, and induced Jesus to leave their country at once, so that the miracle prevented Him from preaching the Kingdom there. Hence Jesus departed from His usual practice, and, instead of bidding the sometime demoniac be silent about his experience, He bade him go home and tell his friends what the Lord had done for him.

The population of this eastern district was largely Gentile, and the readiness with which Jesus departed may be an indication that He felt no call to preach to any but Jews. Perhaps, indeed, He had simply sought solitude there, and rest from active ministry; and if so, the incident did not affect His work.

It is doubtful whether the reader, whose

impressions we are trying to realise, would have thought it necessary to discuss the morality of our Lord's conduct—at any rate, St Mark had no misgivings. There was, indeed, a wholesale destruction of other people's property without compensation or apology; but this would seem to the reader the result of an unforeseen accident. Who could calculate, or be responsible for, the vagaries of an army of demons expelled from their chosen habitation?

JAIRUS' DAUGHTER AND THE WOMAN WITH
THE ISSUE, v. 21-43

We come next to two incidents, the Raising of Jairus' Daughter, and the Healing of the Woman with the Issue, which are so closely combined that they must be considered together.

When Jesus again reached the western shore of the lake, He was met by the usual crowd. On this occasion they were escorting, so to speak, a ruler of a synagogue, probably at Capernaum—a man of some position, corresponding roughly to a deacon or church-

warden. His twelve-year old daughter lay dying, and he begged Jesus to save her. Jesus went with him, and the crowd followed and thronged Him.

In the confusion another sufferer found her opportunity. A woman had suffered for many years from an obstinate ailment, an issue of blood, which had defied such skill as the doctors of the time possessed. She had absolute faith in Jesus, but in her modesty and diffidence she had shrunk from obtruding herself upon His notice. Now it seemed that she could snatch a blessing unperceived. She made her way through the crowd and touched His robe; at once she felt that she was healed, and tried to escape as unnoticed as she had come.

But there was an abrupt pause in the movement of the crowd; Jesus had stopped and turned round, and was looking with searching eyes on those about Him. As He turned, He spoke with a certain sharpness inspired by a new and startling experience: "Who touched my clothes?" The words seemed to the woman to be charged with stern reproof,

and her retreat was arrested. A moment's respite was afforded her by the disciples' answer to their Master's question, "Thou seest the crowd pressing on Thee and sayest, Who touched Me?" But Jesus took no notice. He had felt a touch that drew power from Him, as no touch had ever done before, and His eyes still sought to discover who had done it. They seemed to the woman to single her out, and frightened and trembling, she came and fell at His feet and told Him all the truth, fearing, perhaps, that she might lose the stolen blessing. But He comforted her with gracious words: "Daughter, thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace, and be healed of thy plague."

As He spoke, messengers from the ruler's house made their way through the crowd to where their master stood by the side of Jesus, impatient at the delay that was wasting precious moments.

"Thy daughter," they said, "is dead; it is no use troubling the Teacher."

Jesus' reputation as a worker of miracles was limited; no one supposed that He could

raise the dead. Jesus, however, heard the message, and bade the ruler "Fear not, only believe." The ruler had seen what faith had done for the woman ; let him imitate her. In order to appreciate our Lord's quiet confidence at this crisis we must remember that He had already spent a measure of His healing power upon the woman with the issue, and that He went straight from her to Jairus' daughter. He did what He could to collect His forces. Just before, in His patient, tolerant, simple kindness, He had permitted the crowd to hustle and jostle Him ; now He asserted His authority and dismissed the thronging multitude and even the majority of the Apostles. Only three were allowed to accompany Him —Peter, James and John—three out of the four fishermen whom He called first of all ; He was fain to strengthen Himself by the sympathy of His dearest friends.

When they reached the house the ceremonies consequent on a death had begun, and the air was filled with clamour, wailing, and shrieking. Jesus surveyed the scene for a while, and then entered the inner court where the mourners

were assembled. At his entrance there was a momentary lull in the tempest of lamentation, and the mourners looked curiously at the miraculous Healer who had come too late. What had He come for? He was going to speak. What would He have to say?

"Why," said He, "do you clamour and wail? The child did not die; she is only asleep."

They burst out into peals of laughter, but He bade them go, and they obeyed. Then He took with Him the father and mother and the three disciples, and went into the room where the child lay, and took her by the hand, and said, "Damsel, rise." At once she got up, and began to move about the room—probably she went straight to her mother. The little group of spectators were carried out of themselves by the tide of overwhelming emotions. When they recovered, the first impulse of some of them was to rush out and spread the wonderful news; but Jesus checked them and bade them tell no one. Then, with that absolute self-possession which He had maintained since He had heard the news of

the child's supposed death, He told them to give the child some food.

There are a few points which must be considered at rather more length. We have referred to the self-possession of Jesus. Our narrative constantly shows that one chief feature of the memories which the early Church cherished concerning Him was His perfect calmness in the most exciting circumstances. He was not startled when He woke in the boat, and found Himself face to face with death ; He was not daunted when it seemed as if the task set Him was not merely to heal the sick, but to raise the dead. Moreover, He did not seek to call forth His mysterious powers by any exciting stimulant, such as music, or ecstatic ritual, or an expectant crowd ; but He sought strength in quietness and self-recollection, and the mute sympathy of friends. When He triumphed over disease and demons there was no sign of exultation. Yet sometimes He was stirred by what would seem a matter of course to ordinary men, as, for instance, by the cold-blooded cruelty of fanatics. Again, He was

sensitive to influences which did not affect others. In this incident He distinguished the woman's timid touch amid the pressure of the jostling crowd, as a mother, even in her sleep, singles out her infant's feeble cry from a babel of loud noises. There was, so to speak, an emotional circuit set up between Him and her, so that He felt the shock of her importunate demand for healing and the immediate drain upon His mysterious forces. By such an experience even He was startled.

Another point is the contradiction between the words of Jesus and the statements of the household of Jairus. According to them the girl actually died; Jesus, however, said that she did not die but was sleeping.¹ We may assume that in such a conflict of authority St Mark intends his readers to accept the view taken by Jesus. How then did Jesus know that she was not dead? Had he questioned the messengers, and drawn His conclusion from the further details He elicited; or has St Mark omitted to tell us that Jesus had

¹ The view that Jesus spoke figuratively, meaning that though the girl actually died, she was not permanently dead, but would soon be resuscitated, seems improbable if not impossible.

already seen the child before He checked the mourners. Either view is possible, but the following is a more probable explanation. He had set out for Jairus' house in the assured conviction that He was going to heal the child; the news of her death seemed incredible because He was not conscious of any power or commission to raise the dead. So that if they were right, His conviction that He was going to heal the child was a mistake. That was impossible, therefore He knew that she was not dead. This view may have been confirmed to Him by some mysterious intuition, such as that by which He was made aware of the woman's touch and its meaning.

Another problem is involved in the command to the girl's friends to tell no one. It was probably called forth by the special circumstances of the moment, but this can hardly be all. The words as they stand would have a general application, as in other passages. Yet the command seems futile. The child's supposed death was generally known; the public lamentation had begun; and it would have been impossible to conceal

the fact that she was alive. Some explanation may perhaps be found in the misunderstanding as to the supposed death. The household would cling to the belief that the girl actually died ; and the popular form of the story would be that Jesus had raised her from the dead. Thus Jesus' reputation as a wonder-worker would be still further enhanced, and His work hindered ; but the excitement might be somewhat checked if Jairus and his family refused to talk about the matter.

One more point before we pass on. The popular tradition would certainly be that Jesus had restored a dead girl to life. If, therefore, St Mark had had no better authority than popular tradition, he would have made it clear that Jairus' daughter actually died, and would have left no loophole for doubt. St Mark's reserve and accuracy on this point can only be due to the testimony of an eye-witness ; that is to say, the evangelist was acquainted, directly or indirectly, with an account of the incident given by one of the three apostles.

THE VISIT TO NAZARETH, vi. 1-6

In spite of the precaution taken by Jesus, the mighty works discussed in the last section must have encouraged the people to resort to Him, and have stimulated their importunity. Now, therefore, Jesus withdrew from the district, and at last turned His steps homeward to Nazareth. No doubt the Nazarenes had heard from time to time of the doings of their fellow-townsman; of His eloquence and His miracles, and also of His heresy; His contempt for the law; His lax life¹; His neglect of the Sabbath; His flouting of constituted authorities, holy and learned men like the scribes; and the bad company He kept, how He went about the country with a disreputable rabble at His heels — tax-gatherers, sinners, and such folk. There must have been Nazarene sympathisers with the Pharisees, who told many scandalous tales about Jesus. The last thing that was known for certain about Him was that His family were convinced that He was mad, and had

¹ As the Pharisees would consider it to be.

set out for Capernaum in order to place Him under restraint. The townspeople may have heard how He had quarrelled with His family, and had disowned them.

Now, however, He and His disciples appeared at Nazareth ; and people could see for themselves that one at any rate of the charges against Him was true, He certainly had a tax-gatherer for one of His chosen disciples. We are not told how He spent His time till the Sabbath ; but when the Day of Rest came, He went, according to His custom, to the synagogue, and began to teach. For a time the people listened, they were even impressed ; but soon there arose a hostile murmur. What right had this man to speak with an air of wisdom and authority ? Who was He that people should credit Him with working miracles ? He was only a carpenter, a member of a poor family known to them all. The murmur grew till it became impossible for Jesus to continue His teaching. He uttered a brief emphatic protest, "A prophet is not without honour except in his own town, and amongst his own kinsfolk,

and his own family"; and then sat down, or more probably turned and left the synagogue. Soon after He left the town.

In the interval, before He departed, He healed a few sick folk. St Mark tells us that, with these exceptions, "He could there do no mighty work." Not indeed that he tried and failed, but partly because His fellow townsmen did not believe in His power of healing—"He marvelled at their unbelief"; and partly because He did not feel the spiritual impulse which moved Him to undertake "mighty works," and assured Him of power to perform them.

The rebuff at Nazareth was the third stage in the failure of the preaching of the Kingdom. Jesus had failed to gain the Pharisees, and had thus provoked the hostility of the chief living religious force amongst the Jews. His appeal to the people generally had been powerless to affect any widespread moral and spiritual reformation. But, hitherto, in spite of the interruptions of demoniacs, and the criticism of the Pharisees, He had shown Himself master of any audience He addressed.

Now, however, in His native town, amongst His kinsfolk, His old playmates and acquaintances, He could not command a hearing.

Probably the episode did not affect His public reputation, but it must have been a profound discouragement to Jesus. Rejection by His own family and townsfolk might well seem an omen of rejection by His own people, Israel; the Shadow of the Cross was already falling across His path. Moreover, the incident was a new revelation of the hardness of men's hearts, and Jesus was astonished at their unbelief. The astonishment of Jesus marks Him out as a stranger on the earth, a visitant from some higher, purer, and nobler world. He is surprised at what we take for granted, the harshness, selfishness, and suspicion which we call human nature.

When he left Nazareth, He did not return to Capernaum, or to the shores of the Lake, but carried His message to the neighbouring villages. Thus the imminent coming of the Kingdom was preached in a new district.

CHAPTER VI

THE MISSION OF THE TWELVE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

vi. 7—vii. 23

THE MISSION OF THE TWELVE, vi. 7-30

WE read some time since that the Twelve were appointed that they might preach; but so far nothing has been said of any such activity on their part. In the interval, however, Jesus had been training them, for instance He had privately explained to them the parables. Now they were sent out two by two that the preaching of the Kingdom might be multiplied sevenfold. Jesus no doubt intended that His message should be proclaimed in every town and village of Palestine. Perhaps He felt that His other-worldliness placed barriers between Him and ordinary men; the disciples being more practical might be better able to reach the hearts of the people.

The burden of the apostolic preaching, like that of John the Baptist, and of Jesus, was that men should repent. Moreover the apostles were invested with the power to cast out demons, and to heal diseases—the marvellous gifts of Jesus were, so to speak, contagious. When the disciples wished to cure any one they anointed the sufferer with oil, a common remedy, and probably used as such and not merely as a piece of ritual. This combination of ordinary means with the operation of special gifts of healing shows that the Evangelist did not draw any sharp distinction between the natural and the supernatural.

The Gospel cites some of the instructions given by the Master; the disciples were to take with them only a staff and what they stood upright in; they were to be dependent on casual hospitality for food and shelter; they were not to be fastidious as to their entertainment, but throughout their stay at any place they were to remain at the house which first received them—a provision which would prevent them from staying long in one

village, since the chance guest was expected to depart on the third day, counting the day of arrival as the first. As hospitality was a recognised duty there was nothing extraordinary about such instructions ; and they are probably recorded as a precedent for early Christian evangelists.

Little is said as to the results of the mission, and from this silence we may gather that the preaching of the Twelve was a failure—a failure, that is to say, in the judgment of Jesus and in the light of later history ; it did not serve as a positive preparation for the Kingdom. Yet the mission was not useless ; individuals were won ; and further progress was made in that proclamation to Israel which was a necessary preliminary of the Coming of the Kingdom. Hence Jesus bade the apostles shake off the dust from their feet against the towns which did not receive them, as a sign that the royal heralds had done their duty, and that the blood of the obdurate was upon their own heads.

But in the eyes of men the preaching seemed successful ; it made Jesus more widely known,

and the cures wrought by the apostles enhanced His fame. Jesus, it seemed, was carrying out a systematic plan by which all Galilee, perhaps all Syria, would be brought under His influence. How would He use that influence? St Mark felt that the mission was a crisis in His career; he interrupts the narrative to tell us what men thought of Him. "His name," we read, "had become known"; and as usual men were specially impressed by the miracles. Some said that He was a prophet like one of the ancient messengers of God; Israel had long mourned its lack of prophets, and now in Jesus the good old times had come again. Others ascribed to Him the unique position of Elijah restored to life. The final word in the record of prophecy was often understood to be a promise that Elijah would return as the forerunner of the Messiah. If any one objected that John the Baptist had announced himself as the forerunner, there was an obvious answer: Jesus *was* John the Baptist, risen from the dead. It was this last answer which commended itself to the guilty conscience of Herod, who had put John to

death. A popular belief that Jesus was a reincarnation, so to speak, of the Baptist, shows that he did not become publicly famous till after John's death, and that the public generally knew nothing of His early life.

It is most striking that, in spite of His miracles, His popularity, and His impressive character, no one seems to have thought that Jesus could be the Messiah — except the demoniacs.

THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

vi. 31-44

The disciples had discharged their commission with zeal, and were tired with journeying, preaching, and the emotional strain involved in healing the sick and casting out demons; and, as had happened once before, Jesus and His followers were so beset that they had not leisure even to eat. On that former occasion Jesus continued His work indifferent to hunger and weariness, but He was more careful for His disciples than He had been for Himself. "Come apart," said He, with His

usual gracious kindness, "into some quiet place and rest." So they went away in their boat to seek some lonely spot. It is not easy to make out the geography, but it seems that the rendezvous of Jesus and the disciples after the mission was somewhere on the western coast of the lake, not far from its northern end, and that they sailed across some short distance to the eastern side. But they did not escape unobserved, and the people followed them along the shore, so that, when they landed, a great crowd had already gathered to meet them. As usual the sense of their spiritual need came to Jesus as an irresistible appeal, and he began to teach them many things; the day wore on; the discourse showed no sign of coming to an end, and still the crowd hung upon His lips. But the more practical disciples became anxious about food for such a multitude, and suggested that Jesus should send them away that they might provide for themselves in the neighbouring villages.

The sequel is only partly intelligible. At the bidding of Jesus, the disciples distributed

to the crowd their own small store, five loaves and two small fishes ; and the hunger of that great multitude, five thousand men beside women and children, was satisfied. How, we are not told, and conjecture is useless in a matter where it is possible that no illumination can be derived from ordinary experience.

THE WALKING ON THE WATER, vi. 45-56

When the meal was ended, Jesus sent His disciples back in the boat to the western shore, while He Himself dismissed His guests. When they were gone He betook Himself alone into the solitude of the hills to pray. These special seasons of retirement for fellowship with God were associated with crises in the life of Jesus. It was after the Baptism that He withdrew into the wilderness ; He sought some lonely place for prayer after the first exercise, probably the discovery, of His marvellous gifts, *i.e.* after He had cleansed the demoniac in the synagogue at Capernaum, and had healed Peter's mother-in-law. Now these evening hours were His first leisure since

the disciples had given Him the report of their mission, and had afforded Him fresh evidence that Israel would probably reject His message. Moreover, we have seen that the mighty works of Jesus were not wrought without cost to Himself. The feeding of the five thousand was so strange an event that the evangelist cannot find words to describe it clearly. Its circumstances and its sequel may well have involved some wonderful experience for Jesus, including perhaps some new light as to the character and disposition of the people and of His own disciples; some new light that gave Him pause and called for reflection on the end to which His work was tending. Hence, in the privacy of night in the lonely hills he surrendered Himself to the fellowship of God that He might understand His life and the Father's purpose concerning Him. He knelt to share

“The silence of eternity,
Interpreted by love.”

Meanwhile the disciples were making small progress in their voyage, for they were labour-

ing at the oars against contrary winds; and St Mark tells us that towards dawn Jesus came to them walking on the sea; and they thought that they saw a ghost, and were frightened; but He reassured them, and went up into the boat, and the wind ceased. St Mark goes on to tell us that they were astonished, because they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. It seems that the feeding of the five thousand was a mystery even to the ministers of the feast. Had they understood, St Mark seems to imply, they would not have been astonished at the further wonder of the walking on the sea. To the Evangelist that mysterious feast was an exceptional proof of miraculous power, but it does not seem to have made the same impression on the disciples who were eye-witnesses. This fact and the obscurity of some features in the story suggest that at this point St Mark was not so well informed as usual, and that he obtained the account indirectly from tradition.

The concluding verses of this section tell us

how Jesus was again beset by crowds seeking to be healed : probably a consequence of these new marvels.

THE TRADITIONS OF THE ELDERS, vii. 1-23

The last few sections have dealt with incidents which added to the fame and influence of Jesus, and therefore stimulated the hostility of His opponents. We now find Him in collision with certain Pharisees reinforced, as on previous occasions, by scribes from Jerusalem ; and, as usual, they were the assailants. Jesus did not spontaneously denounce them, but they attacked the disciples, and in defending His followers Jesus was led to repudiate the Pharisaic doctrine.

In this case the cause of offence was neglect of ceremonial washings before meals, a sin which was not due to the teaching of Jesus, but to the natural carelessness of fishermen and peasants. Had they continued fishermen the Pharisees would not have troubled about the Master ; but the disciples were now the chosen friends of a religious leader, and they

had recently been preaching themselves. It was scandalous that they should neglect forms observed by all religious folk ; to use a modern parallel, it was like a minister omitting to say grace.

The scribes, then, had noticed that some of the disciples did not wash their hands before a meal, and they came to Jesus for an explanation of such laxity. Somehow the demand roused Him to one of His rare outbursts of indignation. He addressed these cavilling informers as hypocrites ; their anxiety for an explanation and their zeal for the traditions were alike insincere—cloaks for the personal animosity of the fanatic towards those who differ from him. Jesus applied to them Isaiah's description of the Jews of his own time :—

“ This people honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me ; they offer me useless worship, for they teach mere human precepts.”

Further, their insincerity was shown by the fact that some of their cherished traditions were inconsistent with the law itself ; so that

while they professed to be zealous for the Divine ordinances, they rejected the commandments of God that they might keep the traditions of men ; or, in other words, the professed champions of the Bible were its worst enemies. For instance, Moses bade a man honour his father and mother, but according to tradition a man might let his parents starve if he devoted his property to God.

This incident affords a striking illustration of the points at issue between Jesus and the Pharisees. Neither the washing of hands before every meal nor the maintenance of parents in old age are expressly laid down in the Pentateuch ; but both are legitimate inferences from what is laid down. If the eating of unclean food was an evil to be avoided at any cost, the hands must be washed before every meal, for the chances were that the hands had contracted some ceremonial uncleanness which would communicate itself to the food, unless it were removed by washing. Similarly the command to honour parents implied the relief of their destitute old age.

But it would be impossible to press all the multitudinous ordinances of the Pentateuch to their extreme logical implications ; some of these would soon be found to clash with one another. More especially the development of humanitarian precepts would soon be checked by the exaggeration of ceremonial demands. Which were to give way ? Wherein could man's love to God be best shown ? In the external observance of sacred acts and seasons, in reverence for sacred places and officials, or in service to neighbours and kinsfolk ? The Pharisee claimed that ritual ordinances as to cleanliness, the Sabbath, and so forth, were to be maintained at any sacrifice ; but according to Jesus, the dictates of humanity and the claims of natural affection took precedence of such demands.

This encounter prompted Jesus to make a public declaration, which widened the breach between Him and the legalists. Jesus had already broken with Pharisaic tradition, but hitherto He had in no way explicitly challenged any of the Mosaic ordinances as given in the Pentateuch. Now He called the multitude to

Him, and declared that men were not defiled by anything from without, but by that which came from within. These words seem clear enough, but they were so startling that the disciples could hardly believe their own ears. When they were alone with Jesus, they asked Him what He meant. He then said plainly that a man is not defiled by what he takes into him, *i.e.* by food, but the words and acts which proceed from him. St Mark adds the comment that thus Jesus made all foods clean, *i.e.* He revoked the Mosaic Laws as to clean and unclean meats. He could not intend that His followers should at once abandon the ordinances as to food, but He regarded them as mere matters of custom and expedience which had no religious value.

This episode was critical both for Jesus and for Christianity. It seemed for the Church independence of Judaism, and on the part of Jesus it involved a larger claim of authority, and a more hopeless breach with current orthodoxy. From the outset Jesus set His authority above that of the Pharisees. He

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now asserted His right to overrule Moses. It was due to the recognition of this claim that the Christian Church did not remain a Jewish sect, but became an independent organisation.

CHAPTER VII

IN GENTILE LANDS

vii. 24-37—viii. 22—ix. 29¹

AFTER the bold step described in the last section, Jesus felt it desirable to withdraw from Jewish territory for a time, and betook Himself to the Gentile districts of Tyre and Sidon. He sought not only security, but also rest and seclusion. As St Mark tells the story, Jesus' recent repudiation of Mosaic Law does not seem to have been premeditated, but rather a spark struck from the mind of Jesus in the clash of controversy. When He came to reflect upon His words in cold blood, and realised all that they meant, He would be somewhat startled. At the outset Jesus had sought to remain loyal to Judaism, its worship, organisation, and officials ; but now He could not be blind to the fact that rejection of the observances as to clean and unclean foods

¹ For viii. 1-21, see Additional Note D.

involved a breach with Judaism. As at other crises, Jesus would wish for leisure and quiet to meditate on the path which lay before Him. Possibly He might find in a Gentile district a welcome obscurity which would be impossible amongst Jews, and the abominations of the heathen might stimulate His zeal for the Law of Israel. Accordingly He went northwards into the districts of Tyre and Sidon.

THE SYROPHœNICIAN WOMAN, vii. 24-30

With divine simplicity Jesus supposed that He would not be recognised, that men would pass without notice the face from whose eyes the love of God looked out upon the world. He came to some Phœnician town, found a lodging there, and hoped to be left to Himself, but He was disappointed, "He could not be hid." If He had hoped to renew His zeal for Judaism, He was disappointed in that also, for His first experience in Gentile territory tended to draw Him farther away from the Law. He was found out by a woman who was

"a Greek, a Syrophœnician"—St Mark is careful to make it quite clear that she was a Gentile. She had a daughter who was possessed by an unclean spirit, and she came to Jesus for deliverance and cleansing. His answer suggests that His recent utterance as to foods had led to a reaction of feeling which made Him hesitate to do anything which might seem to imply lack of loyalty to the chosen people and their religion.

"Let the children first be filled," He said, "for it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs."

"Yea, Lord," she answered, "even the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs."

Her humility might have soothed the sectarian jealousy of the most bigoted Pharisee, and before such an appeal the kindly nature of Jesus was helpless; He surrendered unconditionally.

"For this saying," said He, "go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter."

And she went home and found it so.

Natural and inevitable as the conduct of

Jesus was, it involved another important development away from strict Judaism. He had hardly ventured beyond the borders of Jewry when He found that He must extend His mission of healing to the Gentiles. Clearly, therefore, unless barriers were built round Palestine, and all Gentiles kept outside, and all disciples of Jesus inside, the message of the Kingdom would reach the Gentiles and they would demand admission. Moreover, the phrase, "Let the children *first* be fed," shows that Jesus had been meditating on this problem, Israel had a prior claim, but the turn of the Gentiles would come ; by and by, when He had more light and wider experience, He would fix the time. At the first shock the woman's appeal seemed premature, an unwarrantable attempt to force His hand ; a moment later He realised that new light and wider experience had come, and He discerned and followed the Divine leading.

After this incident Jesus left the neighbourhood of Tyre and went northwards along the coast to Sidon, passed through that city, and then turned inland to the south-west, and

made His way to Decapolis, the half Gentile district east of the Sea of Galilee. We are told nothing more of His journey; there was no proclaiming of the message in these Gentile lands; and, no doubt, as He got further from home He found leisure to think out anew His relation to Judaism and also to the world.

HEALING OF DEAF MUTE, vii. 31-37

When He reached Decapolis, and only the lake separated Him from the scene of His active ministry, we find Him once more surrounded by a multitude. There was brought to Him a deaf man with an impediment in his speech. The case presented special difficulties. Faith was usually a condition of healing; how could a deaf man's faith be quickened? Jesus took him aside privately; put His fingers in his ears; spat and touched his tongue. By such gestures, by looks, and by general manner, Jesus suggested to the sufferer that he was about to be healed, and made a successful appeal to his faith. Then He looked up to heaven

and sighed, and said to him, "Be opened"; and the man's ears were opened and his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly. Once again Jesus made a futile attempt to keep His gifts of healing a secret, but "the more He charged them, the more they published it."

HEALING OF THE BLIND MAN, viii. 22-26

One or two features of the incident just dealt with are best considered in connection with the next¹ incident, the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida. Probably this is the Bethsaida to the north-east of the Sea of Galilee, and both these cures were wrought in half-Gentile districts and perhaps upon Gentiles. The two incidents are also similar in other respects. In both (i) the patient was brought to Jesus; (ii) He took him apart to some retired spot; He took the blind man outside the village. As we have seen before, Jesus seeks strength for His mighty works in retirement, and does not

¹ See the note at the beginning of this section.

rely upon the stimulus of an excited and expectant crowd. (iii) Blindness, like deafness, hindered the appeal to the man's faith, he could not *see* Jesus, or feel the influence of His expression, and especially of His eyes. Hence in this case, also, Jesus seeks to stimulate faith by His acts and gestures; He spit on his eyes and laid His hands on them.

(iv) The use of spittle in these two cases seems to be a use of means, like the anointing with oil by the disciples on their mission. Saliva was regarded in the east as having healing power. Here, therefore, is another illustration of the fact that neither Jesus, nor the disciples, nor the Evangelist drew any sharp line between the natural and the supernatural. The essence of the "mighty work" was not exactly that which we call miraculous. It was a "mighty work," a "sign," a "wonder," something that no ordinary man could do; but no one thought of the "laws of nature" and their relation to such deeds, nor did the use of means affect the impression made.

(v) In the previous case the sigh of Jesus

is a sign of effort on His part, and here the effort is still more marked. At first the cure was only partial. "Dost thou see aught?" said Jesus; and the man looked up and said, "I see men, for I behold them as trees walking." A second exertion of healing energy was necessary; again He laid His hands upon his eyes, this time with complete success; the man exerted himself to look, and was restored, and saw everything clearly. The record of effort and of temporary partial failure is another illustration of the frankness of the Evangelist.

(vi) Finally, there was yet another effort to keep an act of healing secret. Jesus sent the man away to his home, saying, "Do not even enter into the village."

PETER'S CONFESSION, viii. 27-30

From the time when Jesus repudiated the Levitical doctrine of clean and unclean meats, He had avoided the scenes of His earlier ministry and the centres of Jewish population; He had been wandering in Phœnician territory as far north as Sidon, and He had

appeared in the Gentile district of Decapolis ; He now turned north again to the village of Cæsarea Philippi, which was practically a Greek city.

On the way thither He held a conversation with His disciples, which was the supreme crisis of the religious history of the race. A time was chosen when perfect privacy could be secured. The hospitality of an Eastern village was public. When it was known that the sheikh was entertaining strangers, his guest-chamber was thronged with neighbours. Hence it was on the journey itself, at some solitary part of the road, probably when they were resting in some secluded spot, that Jesus put a crucial question to the disciples. Gradually He had been compelled to abandon all expectation of winning the nation at large or its religious leaders, and His hopes had become more and more centred in His immediate followers. Now the time had come for Him to test this last hope. He began, with a preliminary question : “What do men say that I am ?” St Mark has already¹ given

¹ Mark vi. 15.

the answer in words almost identical with those which we find here. All were agreed that He was no mere man, but that in Him the spirit of some ancient worthy lived again ; He might be Elijah, or some other of the prophets, or possibly John the Baptist. Even now it seemed as if no one—except the demoniacs—thought of Him as the Messiah. And yet the Jews were very ready to welcome pretenders to Messiahship, so that their failure to ascribe this title to Jesus is remarkable. It measures alike the success and the failure of His popular ministry ; He had succeeded in teaching the people that He was not the mere conqueror and king of the vulgar imagination ; but He had failed to convince them that they ought to change their ideas of the Messiah, and that the true Messiah would be a spiritual hero and redeemer.

One hope was left. How far had the Apostles understood Him ? “ Whom say ye that I am ? ” Peter, spokesman as usual, answered, “ Thou art the Messiah.”

The Evangelist implies that Jesus accepted

the title, that He Himself, therefore, had become conscious that He was the Messiah, and that He desired that His disciples should believe in His Messiahship. It is easy to understand that the disciples would be ready to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah if He gave them the least encouragement. His repudiation of popular ideas could not neutralise the effect of His personality on those who knew Him best. They might not know how to reconcile His teaching or His policy with what they had learnt as to the expected Saviour and King; but they felt no lower, no less unique rank, could properly belong to Him.

But the reader, whose impressions we are trying to reconstruct, would also ask how Jesus came to believe Himself the Messiah, and what He understood by the term. St Mark has given no explanations, neither does he quote any saying of Jesus on either topic. Probably he would not feel that the data enabled him to answer these questions satisfactorily; but the kind of answers suggested might be somewhat as follows. The social position and education of Jesus imply that His

ideas would start from the popular views of the Messiah as the social and religious reformer and the restorer of independence and empire to Israel. Some such words would serve as a common formula for the ideas of the Jews in general as to the Messiah ; but the ideas would be variously shaped and coloured in the minds of different individuals. For Jesus of Nazareth, the Reformer and Saviour would become an ideal figure corresponding to the nobility of His nature. How, then, did Jesus come to identify Himself with this ideal ? We can hardly think that Messiahship was looked upon as a destination to which a youth of exceptional endowments might naturally aspire ; and no careful reader of St Mark's Gospel could credit Jesus with such reasoning as, "Because I am specially gifted, I must be the Messiah." Nevertheless, there had been much in His experience to make Him feel that He was marked out from other men ; He found that He possessed unique powers over the bodies, minds, and souls of men ; He had a sense of close fellowship with God as His Father ; and in the experiences of

the Baptism and the Temptation He had realised that He was the beloved Son entrusted with a supreme Divine mission. Doubtless, too, the idea that He was the Messiah was often suggested to Him from without, as when John the Baptist spoke of Him as, "He that is mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose." But, according to St Mark, such suggestions were made most frequently and explicitly by demoniacs, whose utterances would hardly be recognised by Jesus as a Divine intimation ; though it might well be supposed that demons possessed supernatural knowledge. Perhaps some clue may be found in the position of this incident in St Mark ; it comes when the complete failure of the public ministry was patent, when Jesus had been compelled to withdraw for a time into Gentile territory, and when His most recent acts of healing had only been accomplished after special effort. Then, and not till then, did He seek and obtain from His disciples a recognition of His Messiahship. May we not believe that His experience of failure led Him to ponder afresh the story of

those whom Israel had rejected before Him? —Jeremiah, the Servant of Jehovah, Job; such reflections would suggest that the triumphant inauguration of a new era might not be part of the work of an ideal teacher, reformer, and redeemer—at any rate, till His earthly career had ended in apparent failure; such examples would rather suggest that death, even a disgraceful death, might be the means by which the Messiah would accomplish His mission. The conviction of His Divine commission and the assurance of final achievement remained unshaken. Three courses were open to Him: either to seek safety by abandoning His mission and withdrawing into obscurity; or to bate somewhat of His ideals and compromise with popular expectations by trying to play the part of a more spiritually-minded Judas Maccabæus; or to declare publicly that He, rejected as He had been by the people, by the religious leaders, by His fellow-townsfolk, and His own family, that He was the Messiah, and to accept the fate which would be the prompt answer to such a claim. To follow this last course was the only way to

perpetuate the influence of His personality, and to secure the fruits of His ministry for Israel and for the world. Thus the call to the Messiahship came in the form of an appeal to Him to sacrifice His life for God and man. The most modest soldier may offer to lead a forlorn hope when no one else is able or willing. Emerson wrote once: "I am only a sort of lieutenant in the deplorable absence of captains." There may have been a time when some such words might have expressed the feelings of Jesus, but there are crises when it is criminal for a born leader of men to profess to be a mere lieutenant, and to refuse the responsibility of captaincy. Jesus, therefore, avowed Himself the Messiah, the Captain of the world's salvation.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE PASSION

viii. 31—ix. 1

This conversation was the crucial moment of a supreme crisis, and Peter recognised its importance. Surely now the Master would assert

Himself, and would use His miraculous powers to drive out the Romans, to restore the independence of Israel, and establish the Kingdom of God. But Peter was once more disappointed in Jesus ; once more He failed, in the Apostle's judgment, to rise to the occasion. He bade the disciples tell no one of His Messiahship ; He would choose His own time for the avowal which would be the signal of His doom ; and He must first prepare them for the tragic ending of their hopes. He began to teach them that He must endure much suffering, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be put to death. The "elders and chief priests and scribes" represented the ruling classes at Jerusalem, the Jewish government as far as the Jews had a government, chiefly in matters ecclesiastical, the official priesthood of the Temple, and the other classes which made up the Sanhedrim. At one time Jesus had hoped to win over the official heads of the people ; but He soon found out that such hopes were futile. The Sanhedrim consisted of Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees had rejected Him at

the outset, and the Sadducees were the party of the Jerusalem priesthood. Jesus must have discovered early in His career that ecclesiastical dignitaries do not sympathise with the reformer who disturbs a comfortable *status quo*. The Pharisees, being in a sense the opposition, would have welcomed a Messiah after their own heart who would have placed them in power ; but the Sadducaic priestly government had no use for a Messiah. His appearance would have been as obnoxious to them as the return of an absent sovereign to a council of regency. If Jesus presented Himself in Jerusalem as the Messiah, He thrust upon the priesthood the alternative of acknowledging or suppressing Him, and virtually compelled them to put Him to death. All this Jesus understood ; yet, as He explained to His disciples His purpose of crowning His ministry by the sacrifice of His life, there arose before Him perhaps for the first time a vision of the glorious future which lay beyond. When He told them that the Son of Man must die, He added, "And after three days He shall rise again."

St Mark notes that Jesus spake "openly"; He did not veil His meaning in parables. Hence the prompt protest of Peter, who took His Master aside and began to rebuke Him. The Apostle's conduct suggests that he was an older man than Jesus. It is easy to imagine the nature of the Apostle's rebukes. If Jesus were the Messiah, it was absurd to suppose that He was to die as a criminal. Such an idea could only be due to the morbid depression of a moment of reaction from the exaltation and exultation due possibly to Peter's recognition of Him as the Messiah. Peter, the decided, practical Peter, had noticed such tendencies before; he would feel called upon to rebuke His Master's weakness, and to brace His spirit at the turning-point of his career. Peter's vigorous common sense would grope helplessly for the possible motives behind the extraordinary utterance of Jesus; but his rebuke frankly suggested that if the Master came to an untimely end, it would be due to some fault of temper or judgment on His own part.

Thus for the moment Peter's zeal and affec-

tion ranged him with the worst enemies of his Master. After an inner struggle Jesus had accepted death and apparent failure, and had committed Himself to this sacrifice by His words to His disciples. He would be worn by the effort of decision and threatened with reaction; the insinuating voices of invisible tempters told Him that His sacrifice was futile and foolish. Now His faithful friend and devoted follower unconsciously made himself the spokesman of these powers of darkness. Jesus broke from him, and turned and looked back to the other disciples. Doubtless they thought what only Peter had ventured to say, and His reply was for them also. In His turn He rebuked Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou judgest as men judge, and not as God judges.”

The next paragraph describes an address to the multitude with the disciples which can hardly have been delivered immediately after the rebuke to Peter, but is nevertheless the sequel to the conversation which has just been considered. Jesus was preoccupied with His coming death; for the first time He refers to

the Cross; He seems to be preaching to Himself as much as to the people. He had been tempted to save His life for noble ends, but "whosoever would save his life should lose it"—to have drawn back now would have destroyed the whole value of His ministry. "Whosoever shall lose his life for the sake of the Gospel¹ shall save it."

Naturally, however, the words of Jesus are equally adapted to the audience He addressed: the disposition which led Peter to rebuke Jesus for His intended sacrifice might lead him to shrink from sacrifice himself; and Peter was a type. Hence Jesus insisted that His own conduct was to be an example to the disciples. They too were to deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow Him. If they were tempted to deny the condemned criminal as their Master, they were to be encouraged by the assurance that the Son of Man would be manifested in glory.

Another saying is given here to the effect that this assurance did not refer to some in-

¹ The words "for my sake" are not certainly part of the original text.

definitely remote future: "There were some amongst the bystanders who would live to see the Kingdom of God come with power."

THE TRANSFIGURATION, ix. 2-13

The episode of the Transfiguration is connected by St Mark with the previous incidents as part of the crisis which was the prologue to the Passion. After six days Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and took them by themselves to a high hill, probably by night, possibly moonlit, or illumined by flashes of lightning. We are not told where this hill was; at least six days had elapsed since Peter's confession, and had probably been spent in journeying; neither is it clear that the incidents which follow occurred immediately. The mention of Moses and Elijah suggests Horeb,¹ the mountain with which the names of both were associated; and it does not seem altogether impossible that Jesus, like Elijah, in His extremity, sought some special manifestation of the presence and grace of God in the

¹ Additional Note E.

hallowed solitude of the most ancient sanctuary of Israel. But, of course, this is only a surmise ; at any rate Jesus led His three disciples to some remote hillside, deliberately chosen, and reached by a special journey.

According to His custom Jesus felt that the crisis called for a season of fellowship with God, but now for the first time He sought the presence and sympathy of His disciples ; the faith which discerned His Messiahship when His fortunes were desperate bound them closely to Him by new bonds of affection. The three whose company He sought had also gone with Him to the house of Jairus ; they were probably chosen, because they were not only leaders among the Apostles, but also associated with Jesus in closer personal friendship than their fellows. It was not St Mark's purpose to describe the private life of Jesus, and indeed during His ministry He had little leisure from His public mission ; such a life must be lonely as far as human intimacy is concerned. Yet the Prophet found amongst His disciples some with whom His relations were specially touched by personal affection.

Such were the three; and one of them was Peter, who had rebuked his Master and been rebuked by Him. Jesus did not exact from His followers adulation or servile acquiescence. He could appreciate honest zeal and loyal affection, even when they led to hasty and mistaken judgments, and to rough criticism of Himself. The loving confidence between Jesus and Peter was so great that He could apostrophise him as Satan, the adversary, and within a few days could ask Peter to share His most intimate fellowship with God, and Peter could accept.

There must have been much curiosity amongst the disciples as to the nocturnal absences of Jesus, which had often been followed by some unexpected action; it was after one of them that He abruptly broke off His first ministry at Capernaum, and after another that He was seen walking on the water. He may have told them that He met with God, and they, versed as they were in the language and ideas of the Old Testament, may have thought that He communed with some visible angel of the Lord, and received from

him instruction, commands, and reinforcement of spiritual energy. So that, as the three followed their Master up the hill, their nerves were strung with excited anticipation of what they were to see and hear. They reached the spot which He had chosen for His devotions, and from the analogy of the scene at Gethsemane we may suppose that He withdrew a little, but still remained within sight and near enough to be heard if He prayed aloud. As the Apostles watched Him they were startled by a change in His appearance, perhaps as the moon emerged from some obscuring cloud, or as a flash of lightning lit up the scene; His garments shone with supernatural radiance; they became "exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them." Whether any further change took place we are not told. They caught fragments of His speech, in which He seemed to be addressing Moses and Elijah, and they beheld an apparition of Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. We are not told the subject or the nature of the conversation, probably because the disciples were not close

enough to hear distinctly. None the less they were overcome with terror at what they saw and heard, and Peter's natural impetuosity led him to seek relief in words ; not that he knew what to say, but speech was easier than silence. "Rabbi," he said, "it is good for us to be here ; let us make three booths—one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." We need not discuss these words, since we are told that Peter did not know what to say.¹ They were the utterance of an incoherent mind, and no notice was taken of them. Next we are told that a cloud overshadowed the little group, and there came a voice out of the cloud, perhaps mingled with rolling thunder, "This is My beloved Son ; hear ye Him." The testimony given to Jesus Himself at His baptism is now repeated in the hearing of His disciples. Their strange experiences rendered them prostrate with fear, but after a while they came to themselves, apparently with a sudden start, and looking round they dis-

¹ The "answered" of the E. V. in verse 5 is misleading ; to the English reader it suggests a reply to words addressed to the speaker, whereas in New Testament Greek the term is also used of any speech called forth by events, circumstances, etc.

covered that the marvels of the night had disappeared—the clouds had passed away, Moses and Elijah had vanished, and they were alone with Jesus, and their Master had resumed His ordinary appearance, the supernatural radiance no longer shone from His garments.

The narrative impresses one as having been composed from the reminiscence of an eyewitness, probably Peter, who was specially interested in his own feelings and experiences, and in what he himself said and did. The version just given involves a measure of interpretation which may be justified in a few words. The view that the incident took place by night is supported by the analogy of the seasons of prayer after the feeding of the five thousand and in Gethsemane, and by the stress laid on the radiance of Jesus' garments; but as the disciples not only saw Jesus, but recognised His companions, we may assume moonlight or lightning, unless indeed Moses and Elijah also were visible by some supernatural radiance of their own. It is true that the narrative concludes by telling us that the dis-

ciples looked round and saw only Jesus and themselves, but possibly the sun had just risen.

The Transfiguration is described from a subjective rather than from an objective point of view, and the description gives us the impression made upon a narrator who was quite unconscious of his subjectivity, and who did not always draw a clear distinction between subjective and objective, to whom the appearance of a vision would be as real as the actualities of everyday life. Moreover the nature and circumstances of the incident did not make for either accurate observation or exact recollection : the desolate hillside, the solitary night, the uncertain illumination of the moon or of intermittent lightning, the excited spirits of the disciples overawed by the personality of Jesus, and by His mysterious audience with God and with supernatural beings—all these influences combined to produce the impression at the time, and to determine the form it assumed in the memory after mature reflection. Hence it is impossible now to go behind the narrative, and recon-

struct an accurate account of the actual occurrence. Nevertheless, such uncertainty does not destroy the significance of the incident. Here perhaps more than anywhere else we see Jesus inspiring awe and terror. It is one of the most marvellous features of St Mark's narrative that the most forcible impression it leaves of Jesus is of His simple, unaffected kindness : He stands before us as the most lovable of men, and yet at the same time we are made to feel that this Friend of man is the most august and imperial figure that ever appeared upon the stage of history. His serenity kindles at times into consuming fire, and His meekness becomes charged with mystic force which daunts presumptuous selfishness. The secret of this marvel is His intimate fellowship with the Unseen ; the man who has unusual supernatural dealings with the spiritual world is always an object of awe and wonder. George Eliot thus describes the impression made by Savonarola's public prayers :—

“ The next instant the pulpit was no longer empty. A figure covered from head to foot in

black cowl and mantle had entered it, and was kneeling with bent head and with face turned away. It seemed a weary time to the eager people while the black figure knelt and the monks chanted. But the stillness was not broken, for the Frate's audiences with heaven were yet charged with electric awe for that mixed multitude, so that those who had already the will to stone him felt their arms unnerved.”¹

The experience of the disciples at the Transfiguration must have been the more thrilling because they were the spectators for the first time of the solemn audience of Jesus of Nazareth with His Heavenly Father, and saw Him conversing on equal terms with the spirits of the mighty dead. It is difficult to say which alternative would furnish the more striking testimony to the spiritual power and dignity of Jesus, whether the actual appearance of Moses and Elijah, or a subjective vision due to the impression made by Jesus and His prayers on the minds of the disciples.

It is more difficult to realise what the Trans-

¹ “Romola,” chap. Ixii.

figuration meant to Jesus. No doubt He found support amidst the dark shadows that gathered thickly about His path; and the reference to Moses and Elijah shows that He was relieved of one perplexity. Jesus had been driven into antagonism to the Mosaic Law; He must have been distressed to find Himself in such a position, for He was utterly loyal to the Divine Revelation given in the Old Testament, and full of reverence for Moses. His work and teaching were based upon the Hebrew Scriptures, and apart from them His Messiahship would have been empty and meaningless; to have discredited the Old Testament would have cut the ground from under His own feet. The Transfiguration assured Him that He was the true successor and representative, not only of the prophets, but also of the legislators of Israel; that while He repudiated the letter of the Law, He was yet enforcing its spirit. The disciples would be confirmed in their belief in the Messiahship of Jesus; they would expect His speedy triumph, and would be more eager than ever to proclaim His real character to

the world. But they were again checked ; as they came down He bade them tell no one what they had seen till the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They did not understand these words about “rising from the dead” ; they were expecting not His death but His triumph ; they discussed the mystery amongst themselves, but did not ask Jesus, perhaps because His manner forbade any questioning on that point, or perhaps because in their inmost hearts they feared lest His answer should strike a death-blow to their hopes. Their conversation soon returned to the great topic which occupied most of their thoughts, the Messiahship of Jesus. Some one raised a difficulty suggested by current ideas, the coming of the Messiah must be preceded by the reappearance of Elijah as the forerunner. Apparently this condition had not been fulfilled, unless indeed the vision they had just seen was its fulfilment ; and yet so transient a visit to earth could scarcely be all that Malachi intended when he said, “I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord ; and he shall

turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." This difficulty they did not hesitate to refer to Jesus, "The scribes say that Elijah must first come." It is curious that there is no explicit reference to the recent vision either in the disciples' question or in Jesus' answer, "Truly Elijah cometh first and restoreth all things, and how is it written of the Son of Man that He must suffer many things and be set at nought? But I say unto you, that Elijah has indeed come, and they have done to him as they pleased, as it is written of him." Jesus again attempts to fix their thoughts on the coming tragedy which they were so anxious to ignore ; yet He does not refuse to meet their difficulty. Elijah had come again in John the Baptist.¹ The passage is important as illustrating the method of interpretation which Jesus used for the Old Testament. Its predictions might be fulfilled in a very elastic sense ; the definite statement that Elijah should come

¹ As in Mark i. 2 ff. the "messenger" of Malachi iii. 1 is identified with John the Baptist. It is clear that here also the Evangelist intends us to understand that the Baptist is referred to.

again is fulfilled by the coming of John the Baptist in the spirit and power of Elijah ; John the Baptist being, as we should say, a second Elijah.

THE HEALING OF THE DEMONIAC BOY
ix. 14-29

After leaving the scene of the Transfiguration, Jesus and His three companions rejoined the rest of the disciples. St Mark's narrative is too fragmentary to allow us to assume that they were close by at the foot of the hill waiting for Jesus. The next incident took place in a populous district, perhaps at some considerable distance. There is nothing to indicate the exact locality, but it was probably in Northern Palestine. We are told that the people were astonished when He appeared, probably because they did not expect Him ; it is also possible that at this time His countenance and manner expressed a certain spiritual exaltation inspired by the experiences He had passed through, and the high and tragic resolution He had taken. He found the

remaining disciples in the midst of a thronging crowd, engaged in unequal controversy with certain scribes. When Jesus appeared upon the scene, the whole multitude, both the disputants and their audience, ran to Him and greeted Him. He inquired as to the subject of the dispute between the two parties. Apparently neither was eager to reply, but one of the crowd answered that he had brought to Jesus his son, who was afflicted by a dumb spirit, which continually threw him into convulsions. Not finding Jesus, he had sought help from the disciples, but they had not been able to cast out the evil spirit. It was quite natural to seek such relief from the disciples. When they were sent out two by two, it was part of their mission to cast out devils, and apparently they had been successful. Now there were nine of them together, and they could not cast out the demon. Certain scribes, who happened to be present, taunted the disciples with their failure; they and their Master were alike impostors. An angry dispute arose; the disciples would retort that if only Jesus were there, they would soon see

that He could cast out demons. And now here He was, in the very nick of time, confronted with a test case. Would He be equal to the occasion?

At the transfiguration He had received the assurance that His work was the legitimate development of that of Moses and Elijah in spite of His repudiation of the ceremonial law. Now the whole question seemed to be reopened. He found His disciples in fierce controversy with the scribes, who claimed to be the representatives of Moses, staking His reputation on His power to work a miracle, although He had never encouraged them to ground their faith on His mighty works. These were the men who were to carry on His work after He was gone. Even now they misunderstood Him terribly, and there was so little time left for Him to be with them. "O unbelieving generation," He cried, "how long shall I be with you, how long shall I suffer you?" Yet now as ever the appeal of suffering was irresistible to Jesus, and He added, "Bring him to Me." The boy was brought, and as in other cases the excitement

caused an acute attack of the malady. The crowd, disciples, scribes, the unhappy father, and the curious spectators, watched to see what Jesus would do. And He, as His manner was, calm, deliberate, master of Himself and of the situation, asked how long the boy had suffered, and the father answered, "from a child," and dwelt upon the danger and distress that the trouble had brought upon them. Then he grew impatient with the Healer's quiet inactivity, and doubtful of His power to heal. "If Thou canst do anything," he cried, "pity us and help us." Jesus took him up, "'If thou canst . . . ! All things are possible to him that believeth.' The hindrance did not lie with Jesus, but with the father's lack of faith. "Sir," he cried out with tears, "I do believe, help Thou mine unbelief." Still it seems Jesus hesitated, and it was not till He observed the growing numbers and increasing excitement of the crowd that He bade the unclean spirit come out of the boy, and never enter into him again. Then with cries and convulsions the evil spirit came out, leaving the boy apparently dead, but Jesus

took him by the hand and raised him up, and he recovered.

When Jesus and His disciples were quiet together afterwards, they asked Him why they had failed in what they had been able to accomplish at other times. Jesus told them that such cures could only be wrought by prayer. The miraculous powers which He possessed Himself, and imparted to His disciples, were no mere mechanical magic. They depended not only on the faith of those who were helped, but also on the spiritual condition of the healer, the intimacy of His fellowship with God.

CHAPTER VIII

LAST DAYS IN GALILEE

ix. 30-50

JESUS' recent experiences had all been preparing the way for the declaration of His Messiahship and the tragic end of His ministry. But His hour had not yet come; He had chosen the ensuing Passover at Jerusalem as the occasion of His sacrifice, in order that the vast assembly of Jewish pilgrims might be witnesses, and that the place and time might help to set forth the significance of the crowning act of His life. But some considerable interval had still to elapse before the Passover, and it might seem at first sight as if Peter's confession, the Transfiguration, and the announcement of the Passion had brought matters to a crisis with the disciples prematurely. Jesus had resolved on a step which must lead to His death; He

had solemnly pledged Himself to the disciples, and yet weeks must intervene before He could give effect to His resolution. This long suspense would dissipate any energy due merely to moments of highly wrought enthusiasm; the fervour of excitement would disappear as day after day went by, and Jesus again and again contemplated in cold blood the grim realities of His future. Yet He went forward without haste and without hesitation, still quietly preparing for His decisive visit to Jerusalem. His sacrifice was deliberate, pre-meditated, prepared for in the abiding strength of God.

AN UNAUTHORISED EXORCIST, ix. 38-41

This last journey took Him in the first instance through Galilee, and in the course of it He visited Capernaum. He kept His movements secret, lest He should fall into the hands of His enemies, and His plans should be thwarted: "He desired that no one should know" that He was in Galilee. He now wandered a proscribed fugitive, where He had

once been the idol of admiring crowds. In this nadir of His fortunes the most trifling token of faith or kindly feeling was welcome, and was counted as meritorious. John told Him of an exorcist who cast out demons by His name, not through any spiritual faith, but because he regarded the Name as a potent spell. He had refused to associate himself with the disciples, and they had forbidden him to use the Name. But Jesus answered them, "Do not hinder him; no one is likely to do a mighty work in My name, and then speak evil of Me. Every one who is not against you is for you." Time had been when Jesus sat at rich men's feasts, but now a cup of water bestowed on one of His followers for His sake would deserve gratitude and recompense.

DISPUTES AS TO PRECEDENCE, ix. 33, 34

In this desperate extremity the sole gleam of comfort came, strangely enough, from the selfish ambition of the disciples. They might misunderstand their Master, but they still

believed in Him ; they were still so confident about the coming of the Kingdom that they thought it worth while to dispute who should be the greatest in the new era. At that time, most men with any reputation for practical good sense would have laughed contemptuously at such aspirations, and bidden the disciples “dispute, more reasonably wrong, the ordering of a shipwreck.”

ANNOUNCEMENT OF PASSION, ix. 31, 32

Nevertheless, these days were no mere period of painful suspense ; Jesus still laboured anxiously to prepare His disciples for the end. The only reason which St Mark expressly gives for secrecy is that He desired to teach the disciples concerning His death and resurrection ; but, adds the Evangelist, “they did not understand and were afraid to ask.” Instead of asking, they left Jesus to Himself, and recurred amongst themselves, as we have seen, to the more congenial topic of the relative dignity of the high offices they were to fill in the Kingdom. Jesus, however, was

not so pre-occupied with His own fortunes as to overlook their dispute. When they reached their lodging He asked them what they had been discussing, and they were ashamed to tell Him; nevertheless, He decided their controversy thus: "If any man desire to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all."

THE CHILD IN THE MIDST, ix. 35-37

St Mark gives in this connection certain sayings about children. Jesus took a little child, set him in the midst, and took him in His arms and said, "He who receives a little child like this in My name receives Me, and he who receives Me, receives not Me, but Him that sent Me." Further on, separately, "If any one cause one of the little ones who believe on Me to stumble, it were better for him if a great millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea." This act and these sayings may be symbolic; the child and the believing little ones may represent humble, simple-minded believers in

contrast to the Apostles, who were clear that they were great, and only doubtful which was the greatest. Or the second saying may be quite independent, and have no reference to the dispute as to who was greatest. The "believing little ones" may describe the disciples generally as men of small account in the world's esteem. But it would be quite in accordance with St Mark's description of the character and teaching of Jesus to understand these sayings literally of children. Here and elsewhere we see that Jesus was fond of children, and they must have been fond of Him; they could not have resisted His winsomeness. In these dark days the persecuted Prophet found much comfort in the artless and affectionate confidence of children, and His thoughts turned to their part in the kingdom. He was not thinking of the acceptance of doctrines as to His person and work; the "belief" of "the little ones" was their trustful love for Him. He was indignant at the possibility that they might be turned away from the kingdom, perhaps by the selfish harshness of His own disciples, and He bade

them receive children as they would receive their Master, or even God Himself. In the record as St Mark gives it, the Apostles are rebuked by the contrast between their contentious ambition and a child's disinterested affection.

OTHER SAYINGS, ix. 43-49

St Mark assigns other sayings to this last visit to Galilee; we cannot be sure of their connection, as they are arranged on mnemonic principles, a group about stumbling-blocks, and another whose key-words are "salt" and "fire." Again, Jesus insists that loyalty to Himself may demand the most painful sacrifices—hand, foot, or eye—yet it is better to endure such losses than to be shut out of the Kingdom, and cast into "Gehenna, the unquenchable fire, where the worm never dies." His anticipations of coming trial, which may purify and redeem, is also expressed in the words, "Everything must be salted with fire"; and by a verbal connection we have a saying that "Salt is good, but if the salt have become

saltless, wherewith shall ye season it?" If the Apostles, who were to be ministers of redemption, fell away, how could they be redeemed? The section ends with a reference to the dispute on the way to Capernaum, "Be at peace with one another."

The brief record of the last visit to Galilee reflects in every phrase the anxiety and gloom of those days, and the calm persistence with which Jesus prepared for His final entry into Jerusalem.

CHAPTER IX

THE MINISTRY BEYOND THE JORDAN

x. 1-31

AFTER a while Jesus left Galilee, and crossing the Jordan came to the eastern districts opposite Judæa. He now felt safer than in Galilee. The eastern borderlands were less settled : the population was largely of Gentiles, and was more directly under the government of Rome. There was less opportunity for official presentation or popular fanaticism, and the desert offered a refuge from danger. Hence Jesus resumed His public ministry. Once more crowds gathered round Him, and He taught them after His old fashion. Thus the coming of the Kingdom was proclaimed in yet another district¹ of the Holy Land. The reminiscences of this ministry are brief, fragmentary, and disconnected accounts of special episodes. Doubtless the burden of His public

¹ As far as St Mark's narrative is concerned.

preaching was the same as in earlier days. When He left Galilee the faithful women who ministered to Him accompanied Him, and remained with Him till the end.¹

TEACHING ON DIVORCE, x. 2-12

It soon appeared that Jesus' enemies had not forgotten Him in His period of retirement; Pharisees soon appeared again amongst His hearers, and sought to draw from Him heretical utterances which might furnish grounds of accusation. Indiscriminate divorce was as great an evil amongst the Jews of those days as it is in some of the United States to-day; and Jesus, apparently, had spoken strongly against this abuse. The practice was justified by giving a very wide interpretation to the ordinance,² "When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.

¹ Ch. xv. 41.

² Deuteronomy xxiv. 1.

When she has left his house, she may go and marry another man." Hence the Pharisees approached Him on this subject in the confident hope of eliciting some blasphemous¹ criticism of the Law. They were not disappointed. They asked Him in the first instance if divorce were lawful; and He referred them to Moses. "Moses," said they, "directed that a bill of divorce should be written, and the woman put away." Jesus in fact had played into their hands by His question; any condemnation of divorce now would be a deliberate and avowed contradiction of Moses, at least so it seemed. But Jesus answered, "Moses wrote this ordinance with a view to your hardness of heart," but the story of the Creation, He continued, shows that the union of man and woman in marriage was an act of God, which man must not undo.

Since Jesus had repudiated the Mosaic law of clean and unclean meats, He had thought out the principle which enabled Him to accept the Pentateuch as a Divine revelation, and

¹ From their point of view.

yet to annul it. The Law was a temporary provision for an imperfect people ; not, as the Jews proudly believed, the eternal glory and privilege of Israel, but in some respects the brand of their shame. Ordinances ethically defective implied moral inferiority in the people ; they were incapable of appreciating or profiting by any higher law. Thus the honour of Moses was saved at the expense of Israel and the Law ; nevertheless, the blasphemy was equally horrible in the eyes of the Pharisees.

When He and His disciples were again alone together, He formulated His views in express contradiction to Deuteronomy, “ Whosoever putteth away his wife and marrieth another, committeth adultery with her : and if a wife putteth away her husband, and is married to some one else, she committeth adultery.”

BLESSING OF THE CHILDREN, x. 13-16

The next incident confirms what was said in the last section of Jesus and the children.

Some little children, hardly more than babies, were brought to Him that He might touch them ; the touch of so great a prophet would have magic in it, and make them strong and healthy. But the Apostles intervened ; the renewed popularity of Jesus' ministry made them more certain than ever that the manifestation of His Messianic glory was near at hand ; and it was beneath the dignity of the Messiah that He should be troubled by the foolish importunity of fond parents. But Jesus was vexed at the mistaken zeal of His followers, and said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of God ; verily, I say unto you, no one shall enter into the Kingdom of God, who does not receive it as a little child." And He took them in His arms and laid His hands on them, and blessed them.

THE RICH MAN'S REFUSAL, x. 17-31

The next episode is one of the few recorded interviews between Jesus and men of wealth and position. Once, as Jesus and His disciples

were starting out for their day's journey, they were arrested by a man who came running in eager haste lest Jesus should have departed before he could reach Him. Experience suggested that he was the friend of some sufferer, and came to beg Jesus to perform an act of healing. But no, for the first time in the narrative we hear of some one seeking spiritual teaching. The man fell on his knees and asked, "Good Teacher, what am I to do to inherit eternal life?" Somehow the word "good" jarred upon Jesus. "Why," said He, "do you call me 'good'? No one is good except One, God." Probably the word in the man's mouth was a mere conventional courtesy. Had it been intended in its full sense, it would have implied a recognition of the Messiahship, the Divine Sonship of Jesus ; His question was perhaps meant to elicit a confession of faith in His mission. But possibly special stress was laid upon "good," such as might be represented by "Teacher, holy, saintly man!" The better any one is, the less he tolerates such forms of address. There is no question of the low moral

standard of sinlessness in its popular meaning of freedom from positive wrongdoing. But men of high spiritual attainments, because they are advanced and exalted, see infinite possibilities still before them; so that to accept the epithet "good" in its absolute sense would be a despairing denial of their own spiritual future.

But Jesus' words about Himself met with no response; and He went on at once to deal with the inquirer's question: "Thou knowest the commandments: Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not bear false witness; defraud not; honour thy father and mother"—another challenge to faith. "You know the Law; has it failed to help you, and are you seeking from Me the help which the Law cannot give?" "Teacher," the man answered, "I have observed all these from my youth"; admitting, therefore, that the Law had failed, and implying that Jesus might be a source of larger truth and grace. Something in his tone and manner touched the heart of Jesus, and looking intently at him, He loved him. Since the early days

of His ministry He had not addressed to any one the special call to join the inner circle of His followers, the Apostles ; but this man had so won Him that He bade him supply the one thing that was lacking, which the Law had not been able to do for him, by selling his property, distributing it to the poor, and joining the followers of Jesus. By so doing he would secure treasure in heaven ; but in accepting discipleship he would be taking up his cross. The one thing he lacked was personal surrender to Jesus, whereby he would secure an entrance into the Kingdom of God, wherein alone there was eternal life.

The call to apostleship involved the abandonment of worldly goods for him, as for the original Twelve ; but the condition was emphasised because he was rich, and such a sacrifice meant much more to him than it did to them. Moreover, the invitation was a call to martyrdom ; Jesus was going consciously and deliberately to His death ; His movements were no longer secret ; He again courted publicity, and seemed to have entered on a triumphal progress to Jerusalem. Once

more His enemies dogged His steps, and observed His sayings and doings with malignant eyes. His followers, men would suppose, must share His fate ; and even if there was some chance that obscure Galileans might escape, this new and distinguished convert who had joined Jesus after His public repudiation of the Law, this wealthy proprietor from the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, would be a marked man. His acceptance of Jesus' call would indeed have been taking up His cross ; and on the way to the scaffold a man may cheerfully distribute his possessions among the crowd. But the Teacher and His would-be disciple were at cross purposes. Jesus spoke in the light of His coming death and its consequences to His followers ; but the rich man, like the Apostles, understood nothing of this. He had come to a great prophet, popular and influential, who might possibly be the Messiah, so that suggestions of imminent calamity fell upon unheeding ears. All that he grasped was that the sacrifice of all he had was demanded as the price of eternal life ; and as he listened his

countenance fell, and he went away disappointed, for he was very wealthy.

Meanwhile the disciples stood by, watching the scene with eager interest. Hitherto the followers of Jesus had consisted of the poor and people of the lower middle-class; now, it seemed, they might be reinforced by a wealthy convert, a valuable accession, and also a dangerous competitor for leadership. But Jesus had imposed difficult conditions, and the possible recruit was lost; and the Master looked round on His disciples, and said, "How hard it is for those who have property to enter into the Kingdom of God." And the disciples were astonished; in this life entrance into the best society is easy for the rich. Jesus explained further, "Children, how hard it is for those who put their trust in riches to enter into the Kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God." The disciples were still more astonished—they seem to have been brought up to respect wealthy men. "Who, then," said they, "can be saved?" Jesus, however,

explained that He did not mean literally that no rich man could be saved ; humanly speaking it was impossible, but might be accomplished by the special grace of God, for all things were possible with God. By this time the disciples had begun to consider the matter from the point of view of their own personal merits, and Peter said, "Behold, we gave up everything, and followed Thee." If this new comer has not faith enough in his "good Teacher" to sacrifice his wealth, you still have the devoted followers who did not hesitate to leave for your sake boats and nets and comfortable posts in the custom house.

Jesus answered, "Verily I say unto you, there is no one who for My sake, and for the sake of the good tidings, has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, who shall not receive a hundredfold now at this time," in this present dispensation, "houses, brethren, sisters, mothers, children, and lands, with persecutions, and in the coming age," the new dispensation, "eternal life." The wording of this answer shows that it is not a commercial contract guaranteeing a

certain profit. The loss of a mother cannot literally be compensated for by the gift of a hundred mothers, and the victims of persecution would not be left in possession of hundreds of houses and estates. There is a note of grave irony, as if Jesus discerned that Peter's anxiety lest his material sacrifices should be forgotten was partly inspired by the hope of material compensation. He had been trying for weeks to prepare His disciples for His coming death, and their insistence on the cost of their loyalty struck a harsh and discordant note. It was as if on the eve of Thermopylæ the Spartans had clamoured to Leonidas for arrears of pay. Yet Jesus had answered with kindly forbearance, and veiled His rebuke in enigmatic language whose meaning only slowly dawned on His hearers. Indeed, we have no complete solution of the enigma now. The general sense, however, is clear. "Do not be afraid that you have made a bad bargain ; even now, in the midst of persecution, you have a larger enjoyment of the ordinary blessings of life than you could have derived from the good things you have sacrificed ; and

you shall have that eternal life which the rich man sought but was not willing to purchase at the expense of his wealth." But He ended with a word of frank warning, " Many that are first shall be last, and the last first."

CHAPTER X

THE JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

x. 32-52

RENEWED PROPHECY OF DEATH AND RESURRECTION, x. 32-34

EVER since Peter's confession Jesus had been preparing for His visit to Jerusalem, and had been moving towards Judæa, first through Galilee, and then through the lands east of the Jordan. The secrecy of His movements in Galilee had secured Him from an arrest which would have thwarted His plans; and His renewed public ministry east of the Jordan, and perhaps in the border districts of Judæa, had recalled Him to men's minds, and raised expectations as to the possibilities involved in His entry into the Holy City; now He began a direct and avowed journey thither.

In these last days Jesus was often pre-

occupied with His coming sacrifice of Himself; He faced this grim prospect alone, for the Apostles' lack of understanding cut Him off from their sympathy. Now as He entered on the final stage of His journey, He went on before the disciples, oblivious of them, wrapped in His own thoughts; and they followed wondering. He bore Himself in the same exalted fashion as when He came down from His interview with Moses and Elijah; the ecstasy of prophetic inspiration was upon Him, as if once more He held converse with supernatural beings; and the disciples followed, silent, awestruck, and afraid.

After a while He roused Himself, and turned to the Apostles, entered into conversation with them, and spoke afresh of His coming death and resurrection; with what effect St Mark does not tell us, but the sequel shows that His words made but slight impression on them.

THE AMBITION OF THE SONS OF ZEBEDEE

x. 35-45

The previous rebuke of Jesus¹ had failed to quench the spirit of jealous rivalry amongst His followers; and His renewed popularity had made them more deaf than ever to His gloomy prognostications of coming doom; rather the glory of the Kingdom seemed close at hand; doubtless Jesus would now inaugurate it at Jerusalem. Dazzled by this prospect, the sons of Zebedee came in eager excitement to ask for the chief places in the Kingdom.

"Teacher," said they, "if only you would do for us whatsoever we ask."

These two sons of Zebedee, John and James, were two of the three Apostles whom Jesus trusted most implicitly, and with whom He was most closely intimate. They had been with Him when others were excluded—at the house of Jairus and at the Transfiguration. "Surely," they thought, "He loves us well enough to grant us special favours." We

¹ Unless indeed ix. 33-37 and this passage are both reminiscences of the same event.

need not suppose that after their experience of Jesus they expected Him to make promises blindfold. They spoke somewhat rhetorically, but what they meant, and what He understood them to mean, was, "Teacher, we are going to ask you a very great favour." He replied by inquiring what they sought for.

"Grant," said they, "that we may sit, one on your right hand, and one on your left hand, in your glory—when you come to your Kingdom."

The request showed great lack of understanding and sympathy towards Jesus, and also a measure of disloyalty towards their comrades. Yet Jesus met them with His usual patient kindness; He sought to avoid the necessity for direct rebuke by a hint of His coming Passion. Surely they must have understood something of His many warnings; if He turned their thoughts to the experiences which awaited Him, they might remember His words and have some sense of the stress and burden of His soul; they might be ashamed of their selfish ambition and forbear to press their request.

" You know not what you ask," said Jesus. " Can you drink of the cup that I drink of, or be baptised with the baptism wherewith I am being baptised ? "

But this veiled appeal was in vain ; the brothers were in no mood to take hints ; what they understood by the words of Jesus, or whether they understood anything by them, we cannot tell ; but they were confident that they could fulfil any conditions attached to the distinction they sought, and they replied :—

" We can."

He had spoken to them in a parable, and they had not understood, and He did not try to explain, but continued in the same strain :—

" The cup that I drink, you shall drink ; and you shall be baptised with the baptism wherewith I am being baptised ; to sit on My right and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

Perhaps the obtuseness and self-seeking of the Apostles made Jesus distrust His judgment in calling them ; He did not doubt their loyalty and affection ; they would be true to Him to

the end and share His fortunes ; but He could not tell what would be their place in establishing the Kingdom and in determining its character, laws, and principles ; these things were in the hands of God.

When the other Apostles heard of the attempt of the sons of Zebedee to steal a march upon them, they were naturally indignant, and probably expressed their feelings in no measured words. Perhaps they complained to Jesus ; at any rate this new dispute came to His ears, and He called them to Him. Now He dropped figurative language and spoke plainly. The Apostles had thought of the Kingdom of God after the carnal, worldly fashion of the popular Messianic ideas ; it was to be a kingdom with a magnificent court of splendid officials, a kingdom in which, as in other kingdoms, men might honourably compete for the highest posts, the greatest honours, emoluments, and authority. Jesus now told them that the principles of His Kingdom were quite different ; there the first and chief would not be the man who was most successful in exacting service, obedience, and deference

from his fellows, but the man who rendered service to all.

" You know," said He, " that those who are counted rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it is not so amongst you. Whosoever would be great amongst you, shall be your servant, and whosoever would be first amongst you, shall be slave of all."

The Kingdom was as the King ; He was not supreme because He had trampled down all rulers, but because " The Son of Man came not to have servants, but to be a servant, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The verses dealt with in this section are of the greatest importance ; they are the most formal statement by Jesus that He was not a Messiah according to popular ideas ; it is also an explicit description of the character of the Kingdom. The simple principle laid down here is comprehensive and far-reaching ; it involves a fundamental and essential feature of the teaching of Jesus, illustrated and confirmed, as He Himself states, in His Passion, the crowning act of His ministry.

In His concluding words Jesus made yet another attempt to win the sympathy of His followers for Himself in His impending trial.

BARTIMÆUS, x. 46-52

In the course of His journey to Jerusalem, Jesus crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho, where He spent the night. In the morning He started again, accompanied by His disciples and a great crowd. The latter need not have actually belonged to His following ; just then the roads were thronged with pilgrims to Jerusalem for the Passover.

On the outskirts of the town a blind beggar, the son of Timæus, sat by the wayside. The Passover pilgrimage might well be harvest time for such ; the many travellers would doubtless be generous ; they were in a festive mood, and under the influence of a religion which laid much stress on almsgiving. But a greater hope was stirring in the heart of the son of Timæus ; he had been told that Jesus of Nazareth was in Jericho and would leave that morning ; he had heard of His mighty

works, and how He had opened the eyes of the blind. Now he waited eagerly for Jesus to pass by, and as he heard the noise made by one company after another, he asked again and again if Jesus of Nazareth were amongst them. At last he was told that Jesus was there, and then the confused noise of the moving throng was pierced by shrill cries, "Son of David! Jesus! Pity me!" The crowd were startled and scandalised. "Son of David" was but Messiah in other words; and hitherto such titles had only been publicly given to Jesus by demoniacs. Any Pharisees in the crowd would sneer at the notion of a Nazarene Messiah whose herald was a blind beggar. Nor would His own followers be gratified at the outcry; Peter, for instance, chafing at the reticence imposed upon him, eager to proclaim his Master's true dignity, would be indignant at being so unworthily anticipated. Many voices were raised bidding the man be silent, but opposition only provoked him to reiterate more loudly than ever, "Son of David! Jesus! Pity me!" Perhaps his cries now first reached the ears of

the Master, or Jesus may have hesitated, as in the cases of the miracle after the Transfiguration and the daughter of the Syrophenician woman.

“Son of David!” The title could not be a mere piece of flattery, part of a mendicant’s stock-in-trade. The blind man would understand little of the meaning of the phrase for theology or for Israel or for the human race. For him the Messiah was the Healer who opened the eyes of the blind.

“Son of David! Jesus! Pity me!” The words were strangely in tune with the thoughts and purposes of Jesus; He was on His way to declare Himself the Messiah, and perhaps already the crowd caught the suggestion of a new departure from the bearing and manner of Jesus and His disciples. Every step was bringing Him nearer to Jerusalem, committing Him more deeply, making retreat more impossible. There is no sign of wavering, but doubts and misgivings must have crowded on His mind. The ringing cries, “Son of David! Jesus! Pity me!” may have seemed words of Divine encouragement and admonition, almost

as much as the voices from heaven at the Baptism and the Transfiguration. "Son of David" might be the promise and omen of widespread recognition of the Messiahship. The importunate and reiterated "Pity me!" would remind Him that the misery and sin of mankind called Him to Jerusalem and to the Cross.

"Son of David!" This public salutation placed Him in a dilemma; He had silenced the demoniacs who greeted Him with Messianic titles; if now He allowed Himself to be called "Son of David" without rebuke or disclaimer, He virtually declared Himself Messiah, and anticipated a step He probably intended to take when He was actually entering Jerusalem. On the other hand, He could hardly disclaim the title now, and accept it a few hours later. Providence, He must have felt, had again taken times and seasons out of His hand, and He acquiesced in its decision. Without making any protest, He stopped and bade them call the son of Timaeus to Him.

Forthwith officious voices cried out to the blind man, "Take courage! Arise! He calls

you!" He threw off his cloak and sprang up. Then, perhaps led by friendly hands, perhaps guided only by the wonderful instinct of the blind, he came to where Jesus stood waiting for him, and heard the Master ask him, "What would you have me do?"

"Rabboni," he answered, using a title of honour only found here,¹ "that I may receive my sight."

"Go your way," answered Jesus; "your faith has saved you."

At once the blind man's sight returned to him, and he joined the company that followed Jesus to Jerusalem.

It was the last of Jesus' mighty works of healing, wrought in response to unquestioning and persistent faith; wrought without effort or delay, in the full tide of spiritual force in which He moved onward to His death.

¹ *I.e.* in St Mark.

CHAPTER XI

MINISTRY IN JERUSALEM

xi. 1—xii. 44

THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM, xi. 1-11

WHEN the blind man had obtained the boon he sought, and had fallen into the train of Jesus, the company moved on, impressed and excited by the fact that the title "Son of David" had been publicly given to Jesus and publicly accepted by Him, and that His claims had been confirmed by a miracle. In time they came within two miles of Jerusalem to the slopes of the Mount of Olives, in the neighbourhood of two villages called Bethany and Bethphage. The distance from Jericho to Jerusalem is about eighteen miles; and, in view of the many events crowded into this busy day, it would seem that Jesus started very early, according to the common Eastern fashion, and rested near Bethany in the heat of the day to

prepare for His solemn entry into the Holy City. His preparations were slight and simple; He intended to ride into Jerusalem, and sent two of His disciples to bring Him an animal to ride upon. The incident is told in fuller detail and at greater length than its intrinsic importance would warrant. No doubt St Mark's authority was one of the two disciples. As the story is given, some mystery attaches to the transaction. The disciples were to go to the opposite village, and as they entered they would find tied up by the roadside an ass's colt,¹ that had never yet been ridden. They were to loose it and bring it. If any one challenged them, they were to answer, "The Master needs it, and will send it back at once." Jesus, it seems, had arranged that the colt should be waiting for Him at a fixed spot, and that His messengers should be allowed to take it away on giving a password previously agreed upon. The owner of the colt would be some sympathiser with Jesus

¹ The Greek word, *pōlon*, is strictly "colt," as R.V., but the occasion, a solemn, peaceful procession, and the usage in Hellenistic Greek (Swete, i. 1) would suggest that the animal was an ass's colt, apart from the other Gospels.

who had not publicly identified himself with Him. There must have been many who admired Jesus and appreciated His teaching, and yet did not enrol themselves amongst His avowed followers. Some lacked courage ; others were not fully convinced of His right to the unique authority which He claimed. This passage and one or two others bring us into contact with an outer fringe of loosely attached disciples.

The method in which the messengers were to obtain possession of the colt was intended to protect the owner. No one gave the colt ; it was taken ; neither Jesus nor the owner was named ; and the disciples were not told to whom the animal belonged. The presence of a traitor in their number would naturally occur both to Jesus and His friend ; and accordingly precautions were taken to prevent the premature betrayal of His plans, and to protect the owner of the colt from punishment for complicity with them.

The two disciples went to the village, and everything happened as they had been told. The colt was brought to Jesus, and His

followers provided it with rude trappings and housings by placing their upper garments upon it, and Jesus sat thereon. The arrangements were suitable to the occasion ; the ass was the animal used by dignified persons for peaceable ceremonies ; and the fact that the colt had never before been used would suggest the peculiar sanctity of the present rider, and the sacred importance of His entry into Jerusalem. Meantime the crowd had learned the purpose of Jesus, and His disciples were no longer restrained from declaring Him the Messiah. The enthusiasm of the people had already been kindled by the healing of the blind man ; so that they lent a ready ear to the Apostles when they proclaimed Jesus the Messiah, the Redeemer and King of Israel ; and announced that He was about to enter the Holy City, to ascend the throne of David, and establish the Kingdom of God. With ecstatic fervour men stripped themselves of their outer garments and threw them on the road to provide a fitting pathway for the Son of David, while others strewed branches in the way.

So the procession moved on to Jerusalem with Jesus in their midst; and those who went before and those who followed after shouted:—

“Hosanna—Grant salvation,
Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord,
Blessed be the Kingdom that cometh, the Kingdom of
our father David,
Hosanna in the highest.”

After this graphic picture the bald sentence which follows is an anti-climax, “And He went into Jerusalem into the temple; and He surveyed everything, and as it was already late, He went out to Bethany with the Twelve.” Apparently the actual entry into Jerusalem was not so dramatic as the start of the procession. There were many entering Jerusalem at that time, and Jesus would not be the only distinguished person amongst them; there would be others, too, who would be received with acclamation. As Jesus approached and entered the city, His following became merged in other companies, and reached the temple without attracting much notice. Otherwise it would be difficult

to understand how a procession acclaiming its leader as the Messiah passed the gate of the city without being challenged.

At the temple, then, He looked about upon all things with the curious interest of a provincial viewing the sights of a great capital. Meanwhile the disciples had been expecting some act by which He would assert His Messianic sovereignty ; a miracle or sign from heaven ; or perhaps public recognition by the priests, the Sanhedrim, and other Jewish authorities, to be followed by a victorious attack upon the Roman garrison. When Jesus passed the gates and nothing happened, except that He directed His steps towards the temple, they would reflect that the temple was the place where the manifestation of the Messiah would rightly take place. But nothing happened at the temple, and as the long and weary day was now drawing to its close, Jesus left the city, and went out to Bethany and spent the night there,¹ either for the sake of being with

¹ We are not told whether the women who accompanied Jesus shared the daily coming and going to and from Bethany. It is more probable that they lodged with friends in the city.

friends, or to avoid the dangers that beset Him in Jerusalem ; He had come to offer Himself a public sacrifice, not to court the dagger of some midnight assassin hired by His enemies. But probably He left Jerusalem simply because He had no accommodation there for Himself and His followers, and had arranged to return to Bethany if He were still alive, and at liberty at nightfall. The disciples followed Him burdened with hope once more deferred ; the great day had come and gone ; He had been publicly proclaimed Messiah, but nothing decisive had been done ; the evening found them again at Bethany, and the Kingdom of God was no nearer than it had been in the morning.

As to the mind of Jesus at this time, we get most light from His repeated declarations that He would suffer at Jerusalem as a criminal. He, at any rate, did not look for any blazing splendour from heaven, or for any deputation of priests offering Him the keys of the Temple on bended knees. For the moment, indeed, there may have flashed across His imagination a wild fancy

of some Divine intervention which would render His sacrifice unnecessary and inaugurate the Kingdom of God in happier fashion. But He would not dwell on such pictures ; we must believe that His stern purpose was never abandoned even for a moment, and was seldom absent from His mind. Probably when He entered Jerusalem, He did not expect to leave it again a free man, but rather looked for arrest or even for death that very night, and He went out to Bethany burdened because He had more hours to spend under the shadow of the Cross, made more grim by the cheerful hopes and eager excited anticipations of disciples who were looking for dignified posts in the Kingdom.

THE BARREN FIG TREE, xi. 12-14

We are not told how Jesus and His disciples spent the night at Bethany ; possibly after the fatigue of the long day all slept soundly through exhaustion ; possibly Jesus betook Himself to prayer so solitary that His followers did not suspect His vigils. At last the new day

dawned, and they set out again for Jerusalem. After the manner of Orientals Jesus took little or nothing before He started, and while He was yet on His way to the city He became hungry. Seeing a fig tree, He went to it expecting to find figs, but there were none.¹ Nature herself seemed to have failed Him when He sought her succour. The tree stood there the very type of a Pharisee, ostentatious and barren ; or like a disciple lavish of loyal profession, but lacking understanding and sympathy. He solemnly cursed the tree in the hearing of His disciples, " May no one ever again eat fruit of thee."

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE, xi. 15-19

They went on to Jerusalem, entered the City, and passed on to the Temple, without any noteworthy incident. In the Temple courts they found a busy scene. The feast was the occasion of a great fair, at which the

¹ The exact interpretation of the words about the fig tree is very difficult, but the intention of the narrative clearly is that Jesus went to the tree believing that He had good ground for expecting to find fruit on it.

pilgrims could buy birds and animals for sacrifices, and obtain the sacred coins which alone were accepted in payment of the Temple tribute. Tricks of trade were rife : the merchants of the capital matched their wits against those of their provincial customers. They perhaps trusted that the pilgrims would be awed by the sanctity of the place and season, and would abate something of the noisy importunity of Eastern bargaining, and allow the sellers to make an exorbitant profit.

Jesus had surveyed the scene the evening before. On both occasions He may have witnessed sharp practice, chicanery, the hungry eagerness for gain. Now, perhaps, some one who thought himself aggrieved appealed to the Galilean Prophet ; the buyers and sellers near at hand crowded round Him to argue the case, each seeking to win His support. When they were silent for His decision, He broke out into fierce condemnation of the traffic.

“ Is it not written that My House shall be called a House of Prayer for all nations ? And ye have made it a den of thieves.” His teaching was promptly enforced by His

Galilean followers, who swept the Temple courts clear of the salesmen and their goods, and thus He drove out the sellers and buyers from the Temple, and upset the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of the dove-sellers, and would not allow anyone to carry a vessel through the Temple.

The disciples hailed the action of Jesus as a practical assertion of Messiahship, a further step towards the establishment of His authority, to be followed, doubtless, by others even more effective. Was not the Holy City polluted by the presence of a Roman garrison? But the disciples were again disappointed; Jesus did not give the signal for the attack on the Antonia, but simply preached to the people on the sanctity of the Temple, which seemed to friends and foes alike a lame and impotent conclusion of a very promising beginning. He had gone so far, men said, that He could neither pause nor go back; He must go on, or perish. But Jesus was not now to be hurried on by the logic of events; He saw no Divine leading in them when they pointed to violence for political or personal ends; He

went His own way, without regard to the expectations of His friends or the personal consequences to Himself.

Meanwhile the news spread through the City ; the mildest rumour was that there had been a disturbance in the Temple courts ; that Jesus of Nazareth, at the head of a Galilean mob, had broken up the customary order of the festival, and suppressed the fair established for the convenience of pilgrims and the general advantage of all concerned. Public order in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover was an anxious matter for both Jewish and Roman officials. The Jews especially dreaded any riot which might give the Romans an excuse for indiscriminate, bloody severity. To the chief priests, therefore, Jesus seemed a public danger, a view of the matter heartily endorsed by His old enemies, the scribes and Pharisees ; so that the priestly officials, for the most part Sadducees, and the popular religious leaders, the Pharisees, were equally desirous of getting rid of Jesus. But for the moment He held the walled enclosures of the Temple with a formidable following, and an attempt

to arrest Him would have caused a fresh riot. So for the time they left Him alone ; and in the evening He let the crowd disperse, and departed quietly from the City with His disciples.

LAST DAYS IN JERUSALEM

At this point St Mark abandons the attempt to give each day's events separately, and tells us¹ that Jesus left the city every evening. The Evangelist records sayings and incidents belonging to the period just before the Passion without assigning to each a definite date ; but the narrative may perhaps give the impression that what is dealt with in this section happened on the same day.

THE FIG TREE WITHERED, xi. 20, 21

Another night was spent outside the city, probably at Bethany, a night during which Jesus leaned on Divine strength in His patient waiting for the inevitable end ; a night of

¹ Ch. xi. 19, R.V.

anxious perplexity for the disciples. In the morning they turned their steps once more towards Jerusalem, and on their way they came to the fig tree which Jesus had cursed. It stood there withered, blasted as it seemed by some supernatural power. Peter called the attention of his Master, and reminded Him that He had cursed the tree, and behold, now it was withered. Jesus made no answer;¹ to Him the episode was a casual incident, out of the line of His special work; but to the disciples the blasted tree was a happy omen, a foreshadowing of the ruin of their Master's enemies. They forgot that He did not curse His enemies.

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS, xi. 27-33

They went on again to Jerusalem and the Temple, where Jesus still maintained the new order and prevented the fair from being held.

¹ In the Gospel as it stands Jesus replies with an exhortation to faith and forgiveness, verses 22-25. But this paragraph is quite irrelevant to its context, and gives the impression that its contents are sayings of our Lord which the Evangelist found without historical setting, and inserted conjecturally at this point. Either, therefore, the actual answer of Jesus was not preserved, or He did not reply. R.V. omits verse 26.

The officials would desire to rescue the sanctuary from "this Galilean fanatic" at the earliest possible moment, but without further disturbance to public order.

First they tried moral suasion ; an imposing deputation, chief priests, scribes and elders, confronted Jesus in the sacred courts, and challenged His claim to interfere with the administration of the Temple.

"By what authority do you act thus? Or who gave you authority to act thus?"

It was an embarrassing question. The disciples would expect Him to answer that He acted in His own right, or by Divine commission, as the Messiah. Any other reply would have been a denial of His Messiahship ; and yet if He publicly and emphatically proclaimed Himself Messiah in the hearing of a crowd of enthusiastic followers, the city would be in an uproar ; it might soon be involved in the horrors of a popular insurrection. Thus the spiritual ideals for which Jesus stood, and His own personal character, would be lost sight of in the confusion. He had, indeed, allowed the multitude at Bethany to acclaim

Him as the "Son of David"; but the incident made no impression on Jerusalem. By this time, however, Jesus had obtained a hold on the populace, and His claim could not be repeated and pushed without causing dangerous excitement.

Jesus, therefore, met the demand of the deputation by a question, and thus suggested an answer, which He would not give point blank.

"I, in My turn, will ask you one thing. Answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I act thus. John's baptism, was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me!"

John the Baptist had borne testimony to Jesus, and if his prophetic calling and Divine mission had been admitted, it would have followed at the very least that Jesus was a prophet and had authority to reform public abuses. It may, however, be doubted whether at this juncture the officials would think of the Baptist's testimony to Jesus, though probably it was known to some of the deputation. Jesus' question had placed them in a dilemma which prevented them considering what bear-

ing it might have on their own demand as to His authority. The dilemma was so obvious that St Mark does not hesitate to describe the feelings of those whom Jesus addressed, although he can scarcely have been in the confidence of the priestly officials. "They reasoned with themselves," he tells us, "saying, If we say from heaven, He will say, Why did you not believe Him? But if we say, from men——." The latter alternative was impossible as an answer, at any rate, in face of the crowd by whom they were hemmed in. "They feared the people, for all firmly believed that John was a prophet." Possibly the priests and their colleagues drew apart, and discussed the matter amongst themselves in some such terms as these; possibly they were merely conscious that these obvious thoughts were in each other's minds.

After a brief pause they answered Jesus, "We do not know."

Jesus was thus prevented from appealing to the authority of John the Baptist, but the failure of the priests to deal with the dilemma in which He had involved them made it

possible for Him to refuse to answer their question.

"Neither do I tell you," said He, "by what authority I act thus."

And under the circumstances they could not very well press the matter.

THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN

xii. 1-12

And yet He answered them after all. In His characteristic fashion He began telling a story. A man let a vineyard on condition that he should receive a share of the vintage by way of rent; but when he sent again and again for what was due to him it was persistently withheld, and his messengers were ill-treated, and some of them murdered. At last he sent his only son, thinking that his recalcitrant tenants would not venture to resist his son. But they said one to another, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and then we may have undisputed possession of the vineyard." And they seized him, and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

He finished the story by declaring that the owner of the vineyard would put his wicked tenants to death, and give the vineyard to others.

Then He added a quotation from the Psalms :—

“The stone which the builders rejected,
The same was made the chief corner stone ;
This was the Lord’s doing,
And it is marvellous in our eyes.”

The story is based on a free adaptation of a passage in Isaiah,¹ and its moral would be clear to the deputation, to the disciples, and probably to most of those within hearing. The vineyard was the people of God, Israel, or, as we should say, the Church ; the owner, God ; the wicked tenants, the rulers of Israel—in the present instance, the priests, scribes, and elders, whose representatives stood before Him ; the messengers were the prophets ; the only son was Jesus.

So far all was clear : the story, in Jesus’ unobtrusive fashion, asserted His claim to unique authority, to Messiahship ; He had

¹ Isaiah v. 1-7.

answered their question and told them that He controlled the Temple as Son of God. But the sequel was unexpected. His audience would expect the tale to end with the triumph of the owner's son over the wicked tenants, but it ended with his death. Thus again we are taken into the confidence of Jesus. He found Himself the object of popular enthusiasm. He had successfully asserted His authority ; none the less, He knew that He was doomed.

The parable angered the priests, and at the same time the announcement of His death seemed like an offer to surrender Himself into their hands. They made a movement to seize Him, but His followers interposed and baffled the attempt, and the official deputation withdrew.

THE TRIBUTE MONEY

xii. 13-17

The Jewish officials next sought to deal with Jesus indirectly. Some time ago in Galilee the Herodians, the partisans of Herod

and the Romans, had allied¹ themselves with the Pharisees, the popular religious leaders, against Jesus. Now the priests succeeded in forming a similar combination in Jerusalem, and sent representatives of the two parties to beguile Jesus into compromising Himself. The allies entered the Temple courts, made their way to Jesus, and presented themselves in the character of anxious inquirers after truth with tokens of the utmost deference.

"Teacher," said they, "we know that you are frank and entirely indifferent to personal considerations, and that you teach the way of God without reserve or compromise. Is it right to pay tribute to Cæsar or not? Ought we to pay, or ought we not to pay?"

Probably they did not expect to deceive Jesus, but they observed the usual forms of polite address in order that they might not irritate His followers. It was another obvious dilemma, and on whichever horn Jesus impaled Himself, one or other of the two sets of inquirers was ready to take immediate advantage of His predicament. If He enjoined

¹ Mark iii. 6; cf. viii. 15.

payment, the Pharisees would detach the people from Him by declaring that He was no patriot, but a friend of the Romans, and an enemy of the cause of Israel. If He forbade payment, the Herodians would denounce Him to the Romans, who would promptly arrest Him and put Him to death.

But for Jesus the question raised a somewhat different problem, with which He had been confronted throughout His ministry. If He endorsed the claims of the Roman government, He destroyed the faith of the people in Himself and His mission ; but if He repudiated those claims, He made Himself the leader of a political revolt, in which His spiritual character and work would be lost sight of—a revolt which would discredit His message by its inevitable failure. Jesus must have thought much on this urgent problem : He must have become familiar with it in all its bearings, and have solved it for Himself as far as its more general aspects were concerned ; indeed, He had probably considered the special difficulty with which He now had to deal.

Naturally He at once discerned the hostile

purpose, which was only thinly veiled by the profusion of polite phrases.

"Why," said He, "do you set traps for Me? Get a denarius and show it to Me."

They brought Him the coin.

"Whose," said He, "is this image and superscription?"

"Cæsar's," said they.

"Render unto Cæsar," said Jesus, "the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Thus He again extricated Himself from what was apparently a hopeless dilemma, and His opponents were amazed at what seemed to them a superhuman, demoniac ingenuity. He had not only extricated Himself, but had succeeded in putting them in the wrong. The Pharisees, in the light of Jesus' answer, had acknowledged the imperial government by using Roman coins; and the crowd would readily identify the Herodians as those who did not give God His due.

But Jesus' answer was no mere quibble. The Pharisees and Herodians were insincere; but their question raised a real difficulty, which

Jesus met by providing, once for all, a solution for such problems—the secular authority might be obeyed in its merely material demands ; its decrees must be ignored when they clash with the diviner dictates of the quickened conscience and the enlightened soul.

THE SADDUCEES' QUESTION, xii. 18-27

Later on Jesus was assailed by another set of *soi-disant* anxious inquirers ; this time the company were Sadducees—the name occurs only here in Mark ; but the Sadducees were the dominant element of the Jerusalem priesthood, and the party must have been represented in the first deputation. But the officials, and the Pharisees too, in their way, were men of affairs and ecclesiastics ; they, therefore, did not suppose that a prophet in the flood-tide of his popularity would be upset by theological conundrums ; their questions turned on practical politics, and an incautious answer would have meant disaster to Jesus and to the cause of the Kingdom.

But the new problem submitted to Him was

comparatively trivial ; these Sadducees represented the scholarly rather than the political wing of the party ; they may have taken a real interest in speculative theology. Now, in matters of doctrine, the Sadducees represented an older orthodoxy, which stigmatised the Pharisees as heretical innovators. Jesus, it seems, had accepted the Alexandrine and Pharisaic doctrine of the Resurrection, which the Sadducees rejected as an unsound novelty. It was on this point that they attacked Him ; they were in happy possession of an ingenious puzzle, by which they had often posed bewildered Pharisees, at any rate in their own estimation. They now looked forward to a similar triumph over the Galilean prophet.

" Teacher," said they, " Moses wrote that if a man died childless, his brother should marry his widow, and that the dead man's family should be continued by the children of this new marriage. There were seven brothers : the first married, and died childless ; the second took his wife, and also died childless ; so also the third, and the rest of the seven. None of them had any children by her. Last

of all the woman died also. In the Resurrection whose wife shall she be? She was married in turn to each of the seven."

There is a touch of scorn in the answer of Jesus, which is given with a fullness and freedom in marked contrast to the cautious reserve shown towards the priests and Pharisees.

"Surely you fall into error because you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God. When the dead rise they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels in heaven. And concerning the raising of the dead, have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the section of the Bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob'? He is not the God of dead men, but of living men. Your views are quite wrong."

Jesus does not hesitate to give a prompt, authoritative decision as to the conditions of the future life, but it is not clear whether the decision is given as a new *obiter dictum*, or as following some authority. Probably it was a new decision, otherwise it would have been

known to the Sadducees. On the general question of the future life, the passage cited is less explicit than the last chapter of Daniel. Jesus did not use this book, because the canon of the Sadducees, the representatives of a stricter and more ancient orthodoxy than that of the Pharisees, did not recognise Daniel as Scripture.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT, xii. 28-34

During the previous conversation, a scribe, a Pharisee, had come up and joined the circle of listeners ; he had heard with approval the emphatic testimony of Jesus to the doctrine of the resurrection, and had been pleased with the discomfiture of the Sadducees. Now he too was moved to put a question, probably in a curious mood, rather than for the sake of posing Jesus or from any serious wish for enlightenment. From his point of view it was a somewhat academic problem : “Which was the first commandment?” *e.g.*, Was the commandment about the Sabbath more important than that about duty to parents, or *vice versa*?

Jesus replied in a more serious spirit, dealing with much larger matters; He named as the first commandment a portion of the *Shema*, the profession of faith which pious Jews repeated twice a day.

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and soul and mind and strength."¹

This ancient word of Revelation—that the essential element in religion was the right and harmonious relation of the whole nature of man to God—had been set upon a pinnacle above all other ordinances by Pharisaic Judaism, and Jesus endorsed this judgment. Nothing, therefore, could be more orthodox than such an answer. Unfortunately the daily repetition of the *Shema* had not always prevented the Pharisees from setting the Sabbath, ceremonial cleanness, and other matters of ritual, above honesty and justice, kindness, generosity, and natural affection; therefore Jesus added:—

"The second is this, 'Thou shalt love thy

¹ Deut. vi. 4.

neighbour as thyself.'¹ There is no other commandment greater than these."

Thus this last inquirer, in his turn, had been met by an answer beyond criticism ; but he was a more appreciative hearer than his predecessors ; he did not receive the words in baffled silence, but welcomed them with cordial approval.

"A good answer, teacher ; you have said with truth that He is one, and there is none beside Him, and to love Him with the whole heart and intellect and strength, and to love one's neighbour as one's self is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Jesus had rarely found anyone to understand Him so promptly and so thoroughly, and this intelligent sympathy was welcome to His lonely and burdened spirit.

"Thou art not far," He said, "from the Kingdom of God." The answer to this scribe brought to an end the heckling to which Jesus had been subjected ; the enemies who had sought to entangle Him in His speech had retired in shame and confusion, and now no one dared ask Him any more questions.

¹ Leviticus xix. 18.

Having repulsed these attacks, Jesus took the offensive and assailed His opponents with a question of His own.

A COUNTER QUESTION, xii. 35-37

"How is it that the scribes say that the Messiah is David's son? David himself said by the Holy Spirit, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I put thine enemies under thy feet.'¹ David himself calls the Messiah 'Lord,' how then is the Messiah David's son?"

No one replied; indeed, Jesus did not expect an answer. His words were a rhetorical challenge, and not a demand for a reply from any particular individual.

The point of the challenge is not clear, but obviously some teaching of the scribes is attacked; for they were the authorities on Theology and the Scriptures, and were naturally appealed to as to the bearing of a passage of a Psalm on the doctrine of the Messiah. As the question was a counter-

¹ Ps. cx.

stroke to the interrogations to which Jesus had been subjected we should naturally seek some light from the narrative of the previous incidents. The priests had attacked His authority as a religious leader ; the Sadducees His knowledge and insight as a doctrinal teacher ; both implied that He was an impostor, a pseudo-Christ. Again, the question put by the allied Herodians and Pharisees was intended to imperil Jesus' position by bringing him into collision either with the populace or the Romans, Jesus' counter-question may have been equally concerned with the practical politics of the situation ; it discusses one of the characteristic notes of Messiahship, and the thought must, at any rate, have passed through the minds both of Jesus and His hearers, "Did He possess this note ? Was He David's son ?" If we follow up this suggestion, it would seem that the scribes had brought forward the doctrine that the Messiah must be descended from David as an objection to the claims to Jesus ; but the doctrine of Davidic descent could only be an objection, if it was supposed that He was not de-

scended from David, and if Jesus and His family and followers were ignorant of any such descent. As far as our Gospel is concerned, Jesus never speaks of Himself, nor does St Mark speak of Him, as the son of David ; the only person who calls Him "Son of David" is Bartimæus, and in his mouth it is a mere Messianic title, and not a statement of knowledge of physical descent from David. According to this suggestion Jesus' question would imply that the absence of Davidic descent was not a valid objection, because the scribes' theory of the Davidic descent of the Messiah was inconsistent with the teaching of the Bible as interpreted by the scribes themselves.

Again the Sadducees had sought to discredit Jesus as a teacher ; probably, too, His last interrogator, the scribe, was partly actuated by a desire to test the claims of the Galilean prophet. Possibly Jesus was now seeking to discredit his adversaries the scribes as authoritative exponents of the national faith. It was on their authority, as the Biblical experts of their times, that Psalm cx. was accepted as

Davidic; that Davidic descent was held to be necessary for the Messiah; and that the "Lord" of Psalm cx. was interpreted to mean the Messiah. Hence the incompatibility of these views showed the incompetence of those who taught them. According to this view Jesus need not have had any answer in His mind; His point would have been that the scribes were incompetent, because it was impossible for them to find an answer.

Another alternative might possibly be suggested by the question of the scribe—that Jesus was merely raising an academic question from motives of curiosity, but such a view is quite inconsistent with His character.

DENUNCIATION OF THE SCRIBES, xii. 38-40

The question was not answered, and Jesus pushed His attack in a more direct fashion. He charged the scribes, that is to say, the Pharisees, with being possessed by sordid vanity, a mean craving for trivial social distinctions; they were greedy and grasping, and given to an ostentatious display of unreal unction.

"Beware of the scribes that love official

robes to walk in, salutations in the market places, and seats of honour in synagogues and at feasts ; that eat widows out of house and home, and pray ostentatiously at great length."

These men were popularly regarded as models of zeal, piety, and holiness, and as authorities on faith and practice ; but according to Jesus they deserved, and would receive, the severest condemnation.

THE WIDOW'S MITE, xii. 41-44

Sometimes, in these last days, Jesus withdrew from the labour of teaching and the jar of controversy. On one occasion He sat a little apart from His disciples over against the offertory boxes of the Temple treasury, and watched the worshippers putting in their contributions. His interference with the festival Fair in the Temple courts had not destroyed confidence in the maintenance of public order ; in other respects things went on as usual, and the gifts were many and liberal. Jesus sat and watched. It seems that, on the modern

principle of subscription lists and open offertory plates, the arrangements were such that the bystander could see the amount of each offering. One after another richly-dressed men of dignified bearing came up, placing large gifts in the boxes, and passed on. Some, perhaps, noticed the observant Prophet, and went away with a pleased feeling that He would be favourably impressed with their generosity. Other worshippers made their offerings; at last, one of them specially attracted the attention of Jesus; a woman poorly dressed in the garb of widow threw in two brass coins of small value, and went on her way like the rest. Something in her manner, a note of radiance, a touch of exaltation inspired by a great sacrifice, betrayed her secret to the Seer who watched her. He called His disciples to Him and said to them :—

“Verily, I say unto you, that this poor widow has cast in more than all they that are casting into the treasury; for they all cast in of their superfluity, but she of her want cast in all that she had, even all her living.”

REVIEW

Here St Mark's record of the public ministry of Jesus closes. Let us look for a moment at these last days from the point of view of the opponents of Jesus, of the people of Jerusalem, of the disciples, and of Jesus Himself. His public appearance as Messiah and His assumption of control over the Temple had added the Jewish officials to the number of His active enemies. Nevertheless, He had more than held His own; yet He had gained nothing but Pyrrhic victories; His assailants were only baffled for the moment, and their temporary discomfiture intensified their hostility. So far, however, they were perplexed by His failure to make practical use of His influence over the people, and by His mysterious hint as to His coming death.

In the same way the populace of Jerusalem were puzzled by the Galilean prophet, who seemed to unite in Himself so much that was contradictory. On the one hand He had been declared the Messiah, and, indeed, He was in many ways most remarkable; His personality

was both winsome and commanding, and He had a most attractive eloquence, to which they listened with much enjoyment. And yet in other ways He seemed to have nothing Messiah-like about Him. He had a great reputation for miracles, but He wrought none in Jerusalem ; He had successfully asserted His authority over the Temple, but He had taken no further steps to make Himself master of the city ; there was no sign of His being the Warrior-King who was to drive out the Romans and establish the Kingdom of God in Israel.

Most of all the disciples were bewildered by the apparent inconsistencies of Jesus ; sometimes His popularity and His triumphs over His opponents excited exultant anticipations of the immediate coming of the Kingdom ; at other times their hearts were sick with hope deferred, and His gloomy forebodings of impending doom filled them with vague apprehensions.

And Jesus Himself ? He was not conscious of any inconsistency, for in simple, straightforward fashion He fulfilled His duties, and

used His opportunities as they came. He knew that the end was both near and certain, and the knowledge isolated Him more than ever from the ordinary concerns of life, and even from His disciples. It was a time of suspense, of waiting for a blow without knowing when it would come, yet with the assurance that it might fall at any moment, and that it could not be long delayed. He was like a man sentenced to death, but not knowing the day of His execution. He might contemplate mundane affairs with a certain detachment, and watch the bickerings of Pharisee and Sadducee, priest, scribe, and centurion, with the serene interest of a stranger studying the politics of a foreign capital. Jerusalem and its people would seem dim and shadowy, and the Kingdom of God the only true reality.

Yet one day passed after another, and the blow did not fall, and He remained alive, at liberty, and a great power among the people. The strained and overwrought situation might become familiar and seem normal and capable of being indefinitely prolonged. The natural vitality of a vigorous man in his prime would

instinctively protest against acquiescence in death and suggest renewed hopes and a happier issue. He retained an unshaken confidence that the Kingdom of God would come through Himself, but He might sometimes doubt whether His anticipations of death and resurrection were to be accepted literally ; there might after all be some less rugged path to the assured end.

Meanwhile all concerned expected a crisis at the Passover ; friends and foes alike would suppose that Jesus was planning some decisive step on the great day of the feast ; and on the other hand the priests would feel it an urgent necessity to regain control of the Temple courts before the festival actually began ; and Jesus Himself might expect some clear indication of the will of God at that sacred season.

CHAPTER XII

THE APOCALYPTIC TEACHING OF JESUS

xiii.

THE last period of the public ministry of Jesus was followed as on earlier occasions by a time of private instruction to the disciples. The text of the discourse was a question from one of them; as they left the Temple for the last time, this disciple was struck with its grandeur, especially with the massive stones used in its construction, and exclaimed, "See, Teacher, what wonderful stones! what wonderful buildings!" Jesus took the opportunity of declaring the coming end of the old dispensation; taking up His follower's words, He spoke first of the Temple, the centre and symbol of Judaism. "Are you looking at these great buildings?" said He. "Not one stone shall be left upon another; all shall be pulled down." At the moment He said no more, but when they had left the city, and were

sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the Temple, the four disciples who belonged to the inner circle—Peter, James, John and Andrew—asked Him privately when these things would happen, and what would be the sign of their imminence. In answer to this question, Jesus unfolded His teaching as to the course of events after His death. Here again He appealed to the current Jewish beliefs, and His answer is largely a recapitulation of the signs and circumstances of the Day of the Lord as they were set forth in the Old Testament and in later Jewish literature, including apparently the Book of Enoch, in which the Son of Man is a conspicuous figure. The discourse might almost be called a summary of the wide-spread popular apocalyptic teaching of the times. Similar summaries may have been current amongst the Jews, and Jesus may have adapted to His own special purpose some well-known miniature apocalypse. Now as ever He is loyal to the revelation made to Israel; He claims that it is fulfilled in Himself and His mission; and He holds to the old faith as interpreted in

the new light of His own experience—an experience so profound and penetrating as to constitute a new Revelation. The national and political elements have disappeared, together with the warrior king winning carnal victories by fleshly armies, and instead we have: "Then shall they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory, and then shall He send forth the angels and gather the elect from the four winds from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of Heaven."

The Day of the Lord is removed to an indefinite, though not utterly remote, future: "This generation shall not pass away, until all these things happen. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away. But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, not even the Son—only the Father."

In these last days of Jesus, in this final crisis, the frail body was quick with a life almost too intense for flesh and blood to contain; every faculty of mind and spirit was strained to the utmost, and there must have

been marvellous workings in that debatable land of human personality, where nerves and senses blend with memory and imagination, hope and fear, faith and doubt. The teaching of Jesus shows that He often thought in pictures and parables, and that His mind was stored with images from prophetic and apocalyptic visions. These images are not æsthetic furniture of the mind, or even mere symbols; they were forms in which Jesus realised experiences of self, and man, and God. Thus when His victorious spirit pierced the thick gloom of the present, and the Son of Man saw Himself triumphant in some vague unknown future, what He beheld were the visions of ancient Hebrew seers realised in His own Person.

CHAPTER XIII

THE INTERVAL BEFORE THE ARREST

xiv. 1-41

SCHEMES FOR THE ARREST OF JESUS

xiv. 1, 2, 10, 11

As after the Transfiguration, the scene changes abruptly from ecstatic visions to the deadly hatred of the enemies of Jesus, and the failure of His disciples. As day after day went by and the Passover came nearer and nearer, the overthrow of Jesus became a more and more urgent necessity for the Jewish officials in Jerusalem. They had to regain control of the Temple, in order that the supreme festival of their religion might be properly observed; they had also to remove Jesus from the scene in order that the Galilean fanatic—as they esteemed Him—might not throw the city into an uproar by playing upon the elated enthusiasm of the

thronging crowds of worshippers. If they left Him alone now, they might be forced to deal with Him during the feast when His arrest would be certain to cause a tumult. Even now it would be safer to come upon Him unawares, apart from the multitude, and take Him quietly. With this end in view they sought anxiously for a suitable opportunity, and Providence, as it seemed to them, came to their assistance in the very nick of time. Only two days before the Passover the priests were agreeably surprised by a visit from one of His intimate followers, who offered to betray the Master into their hands. A bargain was soon struck, and the traitor, Judas Iscariot by name, one of the Twelve, promised to find some occasion on which the priests could quietly and safely seize Jesus. From that moment he was constantly listening and watching for information that would enable him to betray his Master.

St Mark does not tell us why Judas became a traitor; but there were many causes at work which tended to alienate from Jesus even His most devoted followers. The devotion of

all His disciples was tainted with personal ambition ; the sons of Zebedee, two of the innermost circle, had sought pre-eminence in the Kingdom of God by underhand means, and their conduct had been bitterly resented by their comrades. Judas no doubt shared the secular ambitions of his fellows, and expected wealth, power and honour for himself from the triumph of Jesus. When Jesus time after time threw away His opportunities, Judas no doubt felt that his personal interests were being sacrificed, and his devotion waned and gave place to ill-will and resentment. The disillusionments of these final days in Jerusalem brought matters to a climax ; Judas saw the last and greatest opportunities wasted ; he and his fellows, it seemed, would not share the triumph of a Messiah, but the punishment of an impostor. In any case Jesus was doomed, and Judas might as well save himself by delivering Him up to the authorities. Had He not deluded His followers with false hopes ? Was He not leading them as sheep to the slaughter ?

THE ANOINTING AT BETHANY, xiv. 3-9

The story of malice and treachery is interrupted that the Evangelist may tell of a woman's passionate devotion to Jesus. The scene changes to Bethany, and we read how, while the priests were plotting His death, Jesus sat at supper in the house of one Simon the Leper. The generous sympathy that had made Him the guest of publicans and sinners had brought Him now to the table of a leper! While they were at supper the neighbours might take advantage of the easy access to an Eastern guest-chamber to gratify their curiosity by staring at the Prophet and His followers. Amongst these onlookers was a woman with a small jar, who made her way to Jesus, broke the jar, and poured its contents over His head. As she did so the room was filled with the odour of precious ointment, and the eyes of all turned to her and to Jesus. The loving reverence of faithful disciples would understand her enthusiasm, and would welcome her deed as an act of due homage, the anointing of the Messianic Priest and

King. But other spectators were cold and indifferent ; the personality of Jesus did not move them from sober, practical, prosaic views ; they were indignant at the waste of good ointment ; some perhaps annoyed at the fuss which the woman was making over this very doubtful prophet ; others not grudging the tribute to the Master, but calm and detached enough to realise that anointing with a moderate amount of ordinary oil would have served her purpose, and would have been more seemly and convenient for Jesus. If the good woman must get rid of her ointment, she might have sold it and given away the price to the poor. Possibly some poor folk, deserving, at any rate in their own estimation, had edged their way into the room, and were there to illustrate and applaud the sentiment. The act might affect them as needy spectators might have been moved by the sight of Cleopatra drinking her dissolved pearls. Some of the company, as they recovered from the shock they had sustained, began to reproach the woman ; but Jesus interposed in a tone of melancholy irony :—

"Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done well what she has done for me. You have the poor always with you, and can help them whenever you choose."

If there was any sincerity in this cheap anxiety that some one else's money should be given to the poor, they would have ample opportunity for exercising their benevolence.

"But me you have not always."

The few short hours in which human ministry could soothe and relieve Him were fast slipping away; the words express His feeling of isolation, His disappointment at the failure of the disciples to understand Him, His baffled yearning for sympathy.

"She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial."

He ironically assures those who thought this more than royal and more than priestly anointing an undue honour. They need not be alarmed. At the same time He quenches the sanguine exultation of any who held it to be the happy omen of His speedy enthronement as the Messiah. It was not really the

prelude to His triumphant installation as Priest and King, but only a funeral rite performed a little before its time, lest there should be no opportunity for honourable obsequies. He spoke as a dying man who knows that his hours are numbered.

He ended with a word of praise for the woman: "Wherever the Gospel is preached throughout the whole world, she shall be remembered, and men shall tell the story of what she did for me."

The incident marks the growing coldness and indifference to Jesus even amongst His own followers. From this scene Judas Iscariot went away to betray his Master.

THE PREPARATION FOR THE PASSOVER xiv. 12-16

At last the slow hours brought the morning of the day on which the Passover lamb was killed and eaten. Jesus had maintained so much reserve that His followers knew little of His plans, and had not even been told where He intended to hold the Passover meal; so

they asked Him, "Where do you wish us to go and prepare for eating the Passover?" As the Passover was a family celebration, this question implied that the Master and His disciples formed a family. Jesus' answer reminds us of the circumstances of His ride into Jerusalem; we get another glimpse of relations between Jesus and adherents who were not closely connected with His usual companions. With these adherents, on this occasion also, He had made secret arrangements without the knowledge of the Apostles. He bade two of the disciples go into the city; there they would meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. Probably Jesus gave them other signs by which they might recognise this man. They were to follow him home, and say to the master of the house, "The Teacher saith, Where is my guest-chamber in which I am to eat the Passover with my disciples?" Then he would show them a large upper room, furnished and ready; and there the two disciples were to prepare the meal.

The disciples went into the city, found all

as Jesus had told them, and made ready the Passover.

Jesus was anxious that this meal with His followers should not be interrupted. He knew there was treachery even amongst the Twelve, and by these precautions they secured one last season of quiet fellowship.

THE DENUNCIATION OF THE TRAITOR

xiv. 17-21

In the evening Jesus and His disciples came to the guest-chamber, where the supper was prepared, and took their last meal together, and the Master spoke to His followers for the last time of the Kingdom of God. The next few hours were crowded with poignant memories, and of this last conversation only a few sentences on two topics are recorded. Indeed, at this time Jesus seems to have been preoccupied and reserved, and His manner might quell the spirits of His companions, so that the meal proceeded in silence, broken only by the brief utterances called for by ritual or etiquette. He may have received a warn-

ing. Treacherous plots are seldom kept secret for days together. When Jesus spoke it was only to plunge His hearers into deeper gloom by His ominous words.

"In truth I tell you that one of you shall betray me, one of you who are eating with me."¹

The disciples broke in upon Him with eager protests :—

"Surely it is not I ! surely it is not I !"

Judas would not be the least insistent. Others may have had thoughts of treachery or desertion, and yet have rallied to loyalty in these very protests ; but to Judas the words of Jesus set an irrevocable seal upon his evil purpose. The disciples were left to the answer of their own consciences ; Jesus merely answered that one of the twelve would betray Him. "It is one of the twelve, one of you who are sharing this meal with me."¹

¹ These paraphrases of verses 18 and 20 might be challenged. They would not be *prima facie* the most natural renderings of the Greek taken as isolated sentences, but they are required by the context. Perhaps the Greek misrepresents an original Aramaic, or has been corrupted by parallel narratives.

Then for a moment the veil that hides the inner life of Jesus is lifted. "The Son of Man," He says, "goes His way, treading the path ordained for Him in the Scriptures." His mind was still occupied with the issue of the crisis; He had meditated afresh on the teaching of the Old Testament as to the career and experiences of the Messiah, but He had found no gleam of hope for the immediate present; from these oracles came words of doom; the Son of Man must die; but, alas, that He must be ushered to the gates of death by a traitor, one of His intimate friends. His wounded heart mourned over the failure of His disciple.

"Alas for that man by whom the Son of Man is to be betrayed; it had been well for that man if he had not been born."

THE NEW COVENANT, xiv. 22-25

The meal went on, and by and by Jesus spoke again of His death, and after the manner of the ancient prophets, He spoke not only in words, but also by acted symbols.

He took bread, blessed it, divided it into portions, and distributed it among them, saying, "Take this, it is my body." In the same way He took a cup of wine, and gave thanks, and passed it to them, and they all drank of it.

Then He said, "This is my blood shed for many as the blood of a covenant. In truth I tell you that I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God."

These sombre, enigmatic words fell heavily on the ears of the disciples, and stirred uneasy questionings; they implied that Jesus was to be offered in sacrifice, and the disciples were invited to partake symbolically of the flesh and blood of the victim. Those who partook of the flesh of victims at sacrificial feasts were the worshippers by whom and for whom the sacrifices were offered. Jesus, therefore, was about to die for them; but were they offering Him up, giving Him to death? He had said that one of them was to betray Him; was that what He meant? But He seemed Him-

self to be courting death. They could not understand Him. His death might involve their ruin ; at any rate, it disappointed their hopes and ambitions. How, then, was He dying for them ? Then, too, in the sacrifices the worshippers did not partake of the blood ; that was poured out at the altar as God's portion. They were to drink wine as representing the blood of Jesus, offered as a sacrificial victim. Such a symbol was unique and awful for Jews ; it suggested terrible Gentile rites, in which the worshippers fed symbolically on the flesh and blood of dead gods.

Then by one of those sudden and seemingly inconsequent transitions which perplexed His followers so that they could not understand His sayings,¹ He spoke of drinking wine with them at a royal banquet.

Thus a momentary glimpse into the mind of Jesus shows that He accepted death as inevitable, in the conviction that He was dying for those who believed on Him. Beyond death He saw Himself reunited

¹ Cf. Mark viii. 17, 21.

with His followers in the blessed life of the Kingdom of God.

WARNING OF BETRAYAL, xiv. 26-31

The meal over, they sang a hymn, after the usual custom, and left the house to make their way out of the city and spend the night outside, in accordance with the plan followed by Jesus during His visit to Jerusalem. Night had fallen, but the full moon of the Passover season cast its weird alternation of light and darkness. Apparently they had no difficulty in passing the gates; at these great feasts many of the pilgrims would lodge without the walls, and egress and ingress would not be strictly controlled. By this time the disciples had learned that they were going to a garden called Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. When Judas heard this, he felt that his opportunity had come; indeed if he were to keep faith with the authorities he must be prompt;¹ otherwise he might be prevented from fulfilling his

¹ St Mark does not tell us when Judas left Jesus.

bargain by some unforeseen event, or by Jesus' departure from Jerusalem at the end of the feast. Therefore, as they passed along, Judas slipped away and betook himself to the High Priest's. Possibly there were other desertions. After a while Jesus noticed the absence of Judas; it seemed a presage that others would leave Him; and that the gradual dwindling of His company of followers would soon be completed, and He would be left quite alone. He turned to those who were still with Him. Judas would not be alone in his failure.

"Ye shall *all* be shaken from your loyalty, for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered."

And again there followed mysterious words that spoke of restoration and reunion.

"But after I rise again, I will go before you into Galilee."

Peter replied, with his wonted impetuosity, ignoring what he did not understand :—

"Even though all shall be shaken, I shall not."

But the months they had spent together had revealed to Jesus the instability of His follower. Peter faithful to the last! Peter patiently enduring the danger and disgrace of the solitary adherent of a discredited Messiah! No!

"In truth I tell thee that to-day, this very night before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice."

Peter was stung to the heart, and protested yet more vehemently:—

"If I must die with Thee, I will not deny Thee."

And his comrades echoed his protests.

GETHSEMANE, xiv. 32-41

When they reached Gethsemane Jesus, as on other occasions, left most of His disciples, and only took with Him Peter, and James, and John. With these three He sought some inner recess, while the others remained on the outskirts of the garden. He knew now that the suspense of the last few days was at an end, and the critical moment had come. By

this time Judas must have betrayed his whereabouts, and the officers would be on the way to arrest Him. Perhaps they might put Him to death on the spot. So now, as often before, He sought God in prayer. When last He prayed thus, supported by the silent sympathy of His three friends, He had been encouraged by the vision of Prophet and Lawgiver, and by a voice from heaven speaking words of approval. But now there was no heavenly vision and no Divine voice. Instead a horror of great darkness fell upon Him; dismay and distress took possession of Him; and He said to the three, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death."

Hardly an hour ago He had been drinking with His disciples the cup which was the symbol of coming death: then He had looked on beyond death to the happier fellowship in the Kingdom of God, but now there is no word of any anticipation of the glory of the Kingdom. Not long since He had asked two of His companions if they could drink of the cup which He was to drink of; now

He asked another question, Must He drink that cup Himself?

He now separated Himself a little from His three remaining companions ; He bade them stay where they were and watch, while He went forward a little—not out of hearing—and fell on the ground and prayed that if it were possible this hour might pass from Him. “Father! Father! all things are possible for Thee, take away this cup from Me.”

The three men a little way off listened with sinking hearts ; hitherto with every presage of ruin there had been the calm stern courage of the Master, and the triumphant note of the coming of the Kingdom. If His spirit failed, where should hope or encouragement or strength be found? Then an irresistible drowsiness crept over them ; they were tired by the long day, worn out by conflicting emotions, and they fell asleep. Later on they woke to find Jesus standing over them ; they might discern the marks of conflict, but as yet their heavy eyes could discover no token of victory. His voice fell upon their ears :—

"Asleep, Simon! Couldst thou not watch one hour? Watch ye and pray, that temptation may not befall you, for the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

Then He left them, and for a while they struggled to keep awake, and again they heard His prayer that He might be spared the coming agony. Then sleep once more overcame them, and they knew nothing till again they half woke and found Him beside them; and dazed and heavy they knew not what to say to Him; and as He turned away, they fell asleep again. Then for the third time He came back to them, and they tried to rouse themselves, but He bade them sleep on and take their rest. The conflict was over; the victory was won; His need was past, and their opportunity was lost.¹

But at this moment He caught the gleam of torches and heard the sound of footsteps and the sound of voices; and now at last the three started up broad awake as He spoke with a sharp note of warning.

¹ The meaning and reference of the word *apekhei*, E.V. "it is enough," is quite uncertain. In the LXX it is used in various passages to translate eight or nine different Hebrew words.

"The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go"—to join the other disciples—"Behold, he that betrayeth Me is at hand."

CHAPTER XIV

THE TRIAL AND EXECUTION

xiv. 42—xv. 41

THE ARREST, xiv. 42-52

BUT as He spoke His enemies were upon Him. No doubt they had taken precautions against His escape, had surrounded His company and come up quietly, so that they were not perceived till they were close by. We are not told what happened to the other disciples, who were not in Jesus' immediate company ; probably they had no time to give an alarm, but succeeded in joining their brethren. The authorities felt that Jesus was the one important person, and treated His followers with contemptuous indifference. Therefore the band charged with the arrest did not at once rush forward and try to seize them all ; such an attempt would have led to confusion, in which Jesus might have escaped.

It had been arranged that the traitor should indicate Jesus by an unmistakable sign : he was to go forward and greet Him as a friend. Perhaps Judas imagined that his treachery was still unknown to Jesus, and that this greeting would disarm suspicion and give time for the officers to seize Him. Besides, Judas would be close to Jesus, and could help to prevent His escape. Thus as the hostile band paused, Jesus saw one man separate himself from them and come towards Him. He recognised Judas and discerned his purpose. The traitor, excited, anxious that there should be no mistake, overdid his part ; not content with the formal kiss of greeting, he hailed Jesus as “Rabbi!” and kissed Him again and again, till his companions hurrying up laid hands on Jesus and made Him their prisoner.

Men’s recollections of this scene were incoherent and fragmentary, but it was remembered afterwards that at least one blow had been struck for the Master. Perhaps the High Priests’ posse had attracted attention, and its object had been guessed ; the meaning

of an alliance between Judas and the Temple authorities was obvious. Amongst others, friends of Jesus joined the party in the hope of effecting a rescue, and now when He was seized one of these drew his sword, struck at the follower of the high priest who was in command of the party, and cut off his ear. There is no sequel to this incident, and we are not told what became of the swordsman. Probably in the prevailing excitement, while the attention of friends and foes alike was concentrated on Jesus, the blow was not noticed for the moment, and the man, finding that he was not supported, disappeared before he was recognised.

When Jesus could obtain a hearing He turned to His captors with an indignant protest.

“ You have come out with swords and staves to take me, as if I were a robber ; for days I have been at your disposal in the Temple as I taught, and you did not seize me.”

Why had they thus sought Him at night in a lonely place, as if He were a criminal,

conscious of His crime and lurking in obscure hiding-places? He had asserted His claims openly in the Temple; He had courted arrest and trial. Why did they not take Him then? He sought to testify by His death to the truth of His teaching. Did they hope to hinder that testimony by sudden murder or secret assassination? Preoccupied with the bearing of events on His cause and His mission, He took no account of the impromptu, abortive movement to seize Him in the Temple,¹ or the prudential reasons which stood in the way of any serious attempt to arrest Him there.² But in a moment He checked Himself; the future of the Kingdom of God was not at the mercy of the petty policy of intriguing priests; the Scriptures must be fulfilled; God would work out in His own way the eternal purpose foreshadowed in His revelation to Israel. Jesus, therefore, allowed Himself to be led away without resistance or further protest, and His disciples fled.

One adherent, however, still followed Him.

¹ Mark xii. 12.

² Mark xiv. 2.

It seems that the noise made by the posse on its way to Gethsemane had roused from sleep a youth who was attached to Jesus ; he had gathered their errand, and without waiting to dress had hastily wrapped himself in a linen cloth and followed them. This improvised toilette was not so different from ordinary dress as it would be with us, and up till the time of the arrest no special notice had been taken of him, and he ventured to follow the party as they set out to return to Jerusalem. But now his costume and his interest in Jesus attracted attention ; some one laid hold of his linen wrap, but the youth slipped out of it and escaped.

THE TRIAL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIM, xiv. 53,
55-64

Jesus was led back to the city and taken to the palace of the high priest. Meanwhile His judges were assembling ; time pressed ; a popular rising in His favour might be imminent, and the sooner He was disposed of the better. With this added anxiety at a critical

season, the Sanhedrim, the supreme council of the Jews, would be ready to meet at short notice, and a meeting would be summoned as soon as the arrangements had been made for the arrest.

The question now arose as to the charge to be brought against the prisoner, and the evidence by which it would be sustained. At first sight everything seemed straightforward. In official circles it was notorious that Jesus was in the habit of breaking the Law, and of inciting others to follow His example. He was a disturber of public order, a usurper of authority, and an impious impostor who claimed to be the Messiah. No doubt much else to His discredit was implicitly believed by the priests and scribes and their followers.

Obviously, however, many of these charges could not be supported by honest evidence. Even as to the Messiahship, Jesus had made no formal claim. His work had been chiefly in Galilee, and it was difficult at a moment's notice to obtain testimony as to the obnoxious teaching of Jesus. The priests desired to

justify a sentence of death; it would not be sufficient to prove some trivial offence.

Abundance of evidence was offered—witnesses are easily obtained by the authorities of an Oriental State; but there was not time to train the witnesses in a consistent story. At last it seemed as if a charge of intending to destroy the Temple could be substantiated, and everything appeared to be arranged satisfactorily. The court was formally opened, and Jesus was charged with this heinous crime. After the necessary preliminaries the witnesses alleged :—

“We heard Him saying, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another not made with hands.’”

But somehow even this testimony broke down when it was produced in open court. The Sanhedrim was a large body, some seventy members, and amongst them there may have been sympathisers with Jesus. At any rate there would be upright men present, anxious to do justice, and shrewd enough to discern and expose flimsy evidence. Something fairly plausible must be adduced if it

were in any way possible. So far nothing had been found, and the authorities felt that there was danger lest a notorious criminal should escape for want of formal proof. But could not this be extracted from the prisoner Himself? Ancient courts did not hesitate to extort confessions by torture, but this practice does not seem to have obtained in any purely Jewish court,¹ but moral suasion would be legitimate.

Till now nothing has been said of the bearing of Jesus, or of any words of His since His arrest. He had soon seen that He need not fear secret assassination; He would be accorded public trial and execution, and men would know that He had sealed His testimony with His blood. Now He was called upon to plead before the supreme tribunal of His people. Whatever formal authority was left to the Jews was concentrated in the Sanhedrim, the official sanctity and dignity of the High Priest and his most distinguished colleagues, the learning of the scribes, and the pious zeal of the Pharisees. They, if any

¹ Torture, however, was used by the Herods.

one, had the right to speak for Israel. He had brought His claims to the final court of appeal.

But, as He had long foreseen, He had only brought them there to be contemptuously rejected. As He looked round at His judges He knew that His condemnation was a foregone conclusion. He might find sympathy in a minority, but no support earnest enough to secure an acquittal. Indeed, in all probability those who were most friendly to Him were least disposed to take Him seriously. His enemies regarded Him with some trepidation ; their hatred was in proportion to their fear. He had the reputation of a wonder-worker ; the Pharisees themselves had declared that He cast out devils by the help of the arch-fiend Beelzebub ; no one knew what supernatural power He might possess ; He might blast the Sanhedrim and the Temple, or even the whole city, by evil magic. His sympathisers, on the other hand, may have regarded Him as an innocent fanatic, whom they would have been glad to spare, though they were not prepared to sacrifice themselves on His behalf.

Jesus had an impossible cause to maintain as far as that, or, indeed, any earthly tribunal was concerned. Whether His teaching had been a danger to public order ; whether it could be reconciled to the Law—as to such matters He was comparatively indifferent. Nor was He anxious about His personal fate, there was no longer any uncertainty about that. Nor did He greatly care about the judgment of the Sanhedrim on His character and work. But it was necessary that the faith of His followers should survive the condemnation and execution of their Master ; that they should continue so to believe in Him as to be able to kindle a like faith in others, and thus bring in the Kingdom of God. His Divine commission and His unique status as God's representative among men, His Messiahship, these were essential elements of His message. He knew that He could not win recognition from the men who sat to judge Him ; but could He so bear Himself in His last hours that He might still be the Christ, the Son of God, to Peter and his companions ? He was weary in mind and

body through the continued strain of the previous week ; through the sleeplessness of the night that was soon to give place to day ; through the alternate depression and exaltation of His wrestling with God in Gethsemane ; and through the inevitable reaction when the blow had at last fallen. For the moment, at any rate, there was nothing to be done or suffered. In His weariness a strange peace fell upon Him. He stood silent amidst the formal bustle of the court and the noisy outcry of accusers and hostile witnesses ; He made no reply, but let opportunities for protest pass unheeded, and challenges to speak go unanswered. But now the High Priest, the President of the Court, rose from his seat, and addressed the prisoner :—

“ Why dost Thou make no answer ? What hast Thou to say in reply to this evidence against Thee ? ”

The words seemed to fall upon deaf ears ; Jesus might have been wrapped in fellowship with beings of another world—God and the angels, Beelzebub and demons, according to the sympathies or antipathies of the

spectators. Again the High Priest addressed Him :—

“Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”

At last Jesus was roused and turned to answer, and men leaned forward to catch His words. Hitherto He had never expressly claimed to be the Messiah, though He had accepted Messianic titles from others; even now if He avowed Himself Messiah, it would not be a spontaneous utterance. He had sought that recognition should come without His asking; not because of His claims, but through the influence of the Spirit of God upon the hearts of men. Now He must either claim the title for Himself or deny His mission. On the other hand, both Jesus and the whole assembly that was waiting for His answer knew that His only chance of escape lay in His disavowing Messiahship. Then perhaps He might be dismissed as discredited and harmless. Would He purchase His life at such a price? The High Priest had asked, “Art Thou the Christ?” and now He answered plainly :—

"I am. Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power,¹ and coming with the clouds of heaven."

The assembly listened, some indignant, some with contemptuous pity, almost all incredulous. Those who feared some terrible exertion of the magic gifts of Jesus were relieved to learn that the manifestation of His power was deferred to a future time. The authorities were gratified because they had obtained from His own mouth the evidence which they needed. The High Priest rent his garments in official horror.

"What further need," said he, "is there of witnesses? You have heard His blasphemy. What is your judgment?"

No one proposed to investigate the claim of Jesus to be the Messiah; it seemed as mad as if some one nowadays were to declare himself Christ appearing again at the Second Coming. "They all condemned Him as guilty on a capital charge"—a general statement that does not exclude the possibility of silence on the part of some members of the court.

¹ Used as a Divine Name.

The verdict and the trial over, most of the councillors went their way to prepare for the observances of the sacred season, some congratulating themselves on having done good service by helping to expose and suppress a dangerous impostor ; others relieved that a disagreeable task was over; some dismissing the whole affair from their minds as mere routine, throwing all responsibility on the officials, and turning to discuss indifferent matters. Perhaps there were a few who sympathised with Jesus ; they had not ventured on any open protest, but they cherished vague hopes of saving Him before the execution could be carried out. The official members of the Sanhedrim seem to have remained to carry out the various formalities that were still necessary.¹

PETER'S DENIAL, xiv. 54, 66-72

Meanwhile Jesus had not been entirely forsaken by His disciples. After the first panic Peter had recovered his self-possession. When he had gone some little way, and found

¹ Cf. below p. 250.

he had made his escape for the time being, he was relieved of the sense of immediate danger, and plucked up courage to turn back and follow at a safe distance. When the company had gone in to the High Priest's palace, Peter mingled with the bystanders, and finding himself unnoticed made his way in, and sat and warmed himself at a fire amongst the followers of the High Priest. Perhaps Jesus had not yet been brought before the court, and was awaiting His trial somewhere else. Peter, however, would choose a place where he might have some view of Jesus and His judges, or at any rate hear how matters were going on, without making himself conspicuous.

But soon a woman of the priestly household joined the circle by the fire; her fellow-servants were well known to her, and she noticed there was a stranger among them, and took a good look at him. She had seen Jesus and His disciples in the Temple, or watched them passing through the city. Peter's dress and air suggested the Galilean, and reminded her of the men she had seen with Jesus.

"You, too," said she, "were with that Nazarene, Jesus." Probably in the comfortable warmth of the fire Peter was half asleep again: and only partially awoke to become conscious that he was the object of dangerous attention, because he was suspected of being an adherent of Jesus.

"I don't know," he faltered out, "I don't understand what you mean."

St Mark calls it a denial, and doubtless Peter thought of it in after times as a denial, but it reads like a confused prevarication that would deceive no one. However, he was not interfered with, but he withdrew into the forecourt, where he would be less likely to attract attention. As he went he heard the cock crow.

But even here he was not left in peace; the woman who had noticed him before seems to have been coming and going on various errands about the palace, and as she passed through the forecourt, she again caught sight of Peter. She had no doubt now as to Peter's connection with Jesus. "This is one of them," she cried for the benefit of all and sundry, and Peter again denied his Master.

Something distracted the attention of the crowd for the moment, but after a while men began to look at him again, and recall his words and his accent, and compare notes. Then they turned upon him :—

“ It is quite true ; you *are* one of them, for you are a Galilean.”

Peter, divided between fear and anger, broke out into the loud volubility of the excited Oriental, and declared with oaths and curses :—

“ I have nothing to do with the man you are talking about.”

Just then the cock crowed for the second time, and the shrill, insistent noise checked Peter in his torrent of words, brought him to himself, and he remembered how Jesus had said that before the second cockcrowing he would thrice deny Him. Peter’s impetuous nature, excited and over-wrought, passed readily from cursing to weeping, and he burst into tears. We are not told the sequel, but the silence of St Mark as to Peter’s subsequent doings suggests that he fled from the scene of his fall and left Jerusalem.¹

¹ In the final clause, *cf.* xiv. 72, *καὶ επιβαλὼν ἔκλαιεν*, R.V., “ And

THE TRIAL BEFORE PILATE, xiv. 65—xv. 1-15

The reader who has felt the fascination of the personality of Jesus and the mingled affection and awe which it inspires, will shrink from dwelling on the scenes that follow. He may even be surprised at the calm, concise directness with which St Mark narrates the indignities and tortures inflicted upon Jesus; he does not find it necessary to express sympathy with Him, or condemnation of His enemies. He is not afraid of compromising His dignity by depicting Him helpless, disgraced, and humiliated. Doubtless the Oriental was not as sensitive as we are on such points; but, even so, the manner in which the story is told implies that the authority of Jesus was irrevocably established in the mind of the Evangelist; it could stand the strain of painful and degrading associations. But to return to the narrative.

After the sentence of the Sanhedrim, Jesus

when he thought thereon, he wept," R.V. mg., "And he began to weep," the *ἐπιβαλών* is unintelligible in its present context. It may be an unidiomatic rendering of some Aramaic phrase meaning, "He wept bitterly," cf. A.V. mg., "He wept abundantly."

was a condemned criminal in the eyes of the Jews; and the officers who had Him in charge indulged in brutal horseplay at His expense. They spat upon Him ; covered His face and struck Him, bidding Him “ prophesy ” who had struck Him ; and beat Him with rods.¹

But the Jewish notables were not competent to carry out the public execution of Jesus ; the power of life and death rested with the Roman governor. At daybreak, therefore, after further consultation amongst the officials, a deputation of high priests and elders, formally invested with the authority of the entire Sanhedrim, took Jesus, bound, before Pilate, and charged him with treason against the Emperor.²

Jesus’ confession of Messiahship was not only blasphemy in the eyes of the Jews, but also treason against Cæsar. The Messiah in ancient days, and in the popular language of the times, was the King of Israel ; when Israel had a king, the dominion of Rome in Palestine

¹ The meaning, however, of the clause rendered in R.V., “ received Him with blows of their hands,” is uncertain.

² The text and rendering of Mark xv. 1 are uncertain, but the general sense seems to be as given above.

must cease. Thus the accusers of Jesus could state that with their own ears they had heard Jesus commit treason against the Emperor by putting Himself forward as King of the Jews.

But as He stood there in His simple peasant dress, worn out with the strain of the last few days, with His long vigil, and with the agony of Gethsemane, bearing in His clothing and person marks of the ill-treatment to which He had been subjected, alone, bound, and helpless, He did not look like a dangerous rebel or a would-be king. Pilate was quite capable of estimating the anxiety of the Jews for the interests of Cæsar at its true value. The fact that He was obnoxious to the Jews, and that the Sanhedrim had formally and officially denounced Him, showed that His real crime was not anti-Roman fanaticism. At the season of the Passover the governor's mind was burdened with the task of keeping order in the overcrowded, turbulent city ; and the arrest of a popular religious teacher might not seem likely to help him in keeping the peace. Nor would he be best pleased at being made the cat's-paw of Jewish heresy-hunters. There-

fore, when he turned from the accusers to the prisoner, it was with a not altogether unfriendly irony that he asked :—

“Art Thou the King of the Jews?”

The question was equivalent to that of the High Priest, “Art Thou the Christ?” and again placed Jesus in a dilemma. If He said “No,” He denied Himself and His mission; if He said “Yes,” He seemed to plead guilty. But the difficulty was less now than before; His claims did not really involve treason against the Romans. He answered Pilate: “Thou sayest.”¹

The words were an acknowledgment of His Kingship; but they are less emphatic than the “I am” with which He replied to the High Priest. The words themselves, their brevity, and the way in which they were spoken, showed that they were not a challenge to the authority of Cæsar. Pilate might not distress himself about Jewish doctrine or ritual; but if Jesus had spent His week at

¹ It is sometimes maintained that these words do not acknowledge that Pilate's suggestion is correct, but that they are merely a courteous recognition of the fact that Pilate has spoken and been understood. But this view is improbable.

Jerusalem in preaching rebellion against the Romans, the governor would have heard of it long since. It is not improbable that representations had been made to Pilate on behalf of Jesus; that he was acquainted with the real state of the case, and knew that Jesus was not a political agitator.

The prosecutors were disagreeably surprised to find that Jesus' avowal of His claims did not elicit from Pilate as prompt a condemnation as His confession of Messiahship had done from the Sanhedrim. Pilate hesitated, and asked for further evidence. The priests replied with a string of accusations, but Jesus remained silent. The governor turned to Him again, and asked if He had no answer to make to the serious charges brought against Him.

But there came no response from the prisoner; again He seemed lost to His surroundings, caught away to some other world, or perhaps in a measure indifferent through sheer exhaustion. Pilate was astonished at His silence.

At this point, however, the proceedings

were interrupted by the arrival of a noisy crowd, clamouring for the annual concession to popular feeling, which was wont to be made in honour of the Passover. Let the governor release a Jewish prisoner according to custom. Pilate did not at once realise that the appearance of the crowd, while the trial was going on, was a mere coincidence. He supposed that they had come just then of set purpose to ask that Jesus should be set free. He knew that Jesus was in high favour with the common people, and that the action of the priests was due to the jealousy aroused by His popularity. The interruption seemed to present a happy opportunity of escaping from a difficult situation by making a graceful concession to the Jews. Pointing to Jesus, he asked them : “ You wish me to release for you the King of the Jews ? ”

Left to themselves, they might have agreed ; for Pilate’s words contained an attractive suggestion. If Jesus had really put Himself forward as a national sovereign, a leader of revolt against the Romans, it would be pious and patriotic to obtain His release. It says much

for Pilate's conviction as to the harmlessness of Jesus, that he was willing to place the people in possession of a "king."

The priests, however, promptly undeceived the crowd ; the word was passed round that Jesus was by no means a zealous patriot ; He was a Sabbath-breaker, an enemy of the *Torah* and the national traditions, a traitor to the national cause, and everything else that was obnoxious to a good Jew. He had been solemnly condemned by the Sanhedrim, alike by priests, elders and scribes, by Sadducees and Pharisees. Besides, there was a worthy object of their intercession—a man who had ventured to strike a blow for freedom, and shed Gentile blood ; a real patriot ; the brave Bar-Abbas. Unless they used their privilege for his benefit, he would die for his devotion to God and Israel. So when Pilate offered them Jesus, they shouted for Bar-Abbas.

And Pilate asked them again :—

"What do you want me to do with the King of the Jews?"

They replied with shouts of—

"Crucify Him!"

Pilate knew that the crowd could not at one and the same time be eager for the release of a rebel, and also indignant with Jesus because He was, as the priests said, an enemy of Rome. Possibly he might get from them the real reason for the persecution of Jesus by the Jewish leaders.

"Why," said he, "what crime has He committed?"

The common people could not, and the priests would not, answer such a question; they were content with shouting more vehemently than ever:—

"Crucify Him!"

The leading spirits in this particular crowd represented a different stratum of the populace from that which acclaimed Jesus at His entry into Jerusalem, and hung upon His lips in the Temple courts. His supporters were largely Galileans, but these turbulent shouters would belong to Jerusalem; and the men who were anxious to have a jail-bird let loose again upon society were not likely to have been specially impressed with the character and teaching of Jesus. Pilate recognised the presence of an

element reckless, truculent, and disorderly, which it was worth while to conciliate at a reasonable price. If they had taken the part of Jesus, the governor would have set Him free in spite of the priests and the Sanhedrim. He was equally willing to gratify the mob by releasing Bar-Abbas and putting Jesus to a shameful and cruel death. Bar-Abbas, therefore, was sent for from prison, and handed over to his friends, who departed with him in triumph, and Pilate sentenced Jesus to be put to death by crucifixion.

Meanwhile the Prisoner stood patient and silent, uttering neither plea nor protest, while His life was sacrificed to save His judge from passing discomfort. In Gethsemane He had recognised that His hour was come, and had submitted Himself to the will of God; He was indifferent to the forms of human law by which the Divine purpose was fulfilled. He had asserted to the last His mission from God; His accusers had proved nothing against Him; the only ground of condemnation by the Sanhedrim was His confession of Messiahship; and Pilate had declared Him innocent

of any secular or political crime. His disciples could still believe in Him.

But there was to be one more stage in the proceedings before Pilate; a criminal condemned to be crucified was scourged before he was fastened to the cross; and this preliminary torture was now inflicted upon Jesus. Then the governor gave orders for the carrying out of the sentence, and Jesus was led away to be crucified.

JESUS MOCKED BY THE ROMAN SOLDIERS xv. 16-20

The soldiers took Jesus from the judgment hall to their own quarters; for them, as for the attendants of the priests, a condemned prisoner was an opportunity for indulging the popular form of humour which finds its pleasure in the pain and humiliation of helpless sufferers. They called together their comrades to share their enjoyment in deriding this haggard Jew, bound, bleeding and dishevelled, who claimed to be a King. They took off His outer garment, and wrapped Him in some purple cloth

that might do duty for a royal robe. They wove a wreath from the branches of some thorny shrub, and placed it on His head as a royal diadem ; and in His hands they placed a reed for a sceptre. Then they offered Him homage in mockery, greeting Him with the salutation, "Hail, King of the Jews," and kneeling to Him in feigned reverence. Not content with derision, they snatched from Him His sham sceptre, and beat Him about the head with it, and spat upon Him.

When they were tired of their sport, they stripped Him of the purple, reclothed Him in His own garments, and led Him out to crucify Him, together with two robbers condemned to the same punishment.

THE CRUCIFIXION, xv. 21-27

It was the custom that a criminal condemned to be crucified should carry his cross¹ to the place of execution, where the preliminary scourging was usually inflicted.² Some attempt, therefore, was made to place this burden upon

¹ Or a part of it. *Encycl. Bibl.*

² *Encycl. Bibl.*

Jesus ; but He sank under the load, and it was plain that it was too much for Him. The soldiers, loath to do work that could be forced on some one else, laid hold of a man who was passing on his way in from the country to the city, and made him carry the cross. Years afterwards his two sons felt it an honour that their father had rendered this service to Jesus ; and those who first told the story thought it well to speak of the modest distinction enjoyed by their brethren ; and so we read that the man's name was Simon of Cyrene, and that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus.

When the cross had been laid upon Simon's shoulders, the grim procession started once more, the soldiers partly leading, partly carrying the half-fainting Jesus to a hill outside the walls called the Skull, where the cross was to be erected. It was now about nine o'clock in the morning, so that Jesus had been four or five hours in the hands of His enemies, for much of the time a victim to insult and outrage.

Before He was fastened to the cross He was offered, according to custom, drugged

wine, as a narcotic to deaden pain ; but He refused it. While life remained, some Divine Act or Voice might yet vindicate His innocence and again confirm His mission, even if it were spoken only to His own heart. He would not shut Himself out from the full consciousness of any word which God might yet have for Him. Therefore, with His physical sensitiveness undiminished, except in some measure by exhaustion, Jesus was stripped and fastened to the cross, which was raised and fixed upright ; and He was left hanging there, His feet a few inches above the ground. At the head of the cross an inscription set forth His crime ; it ran "The King of the Jews." His accusers had not been wholly successful in branding Him as a blasphemer and a traitor to the Law ; the casual spectator would imagine that He died a martyr for the Hope of Israel—one of the many cases in which men arrive at the truth by devious paths. His two companions in misfortune were crucified beside Him, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then the soldiers who were left on guard sat down to

watch ; the clothes of the criminals were, it seems, their perquisites, which they divided amongst themselves by lot.¹

THE THREEFOLD MOCKING, xv. 29-32

The agony and shame of a malefactor were a welcome public spectacle ; and the crowd gathered to witness the execution, jeered at the would-be Messiah, whose sufferings seemed a clear proof of imposture. They had heard that He had promised to destroy the Temple and build it again in three days. Surely, then, He could release Himself from the cross ; or, at any rate, God would release Him. Passers-by wagged their heads at Him, and shouted :—

“ Oh, thou destroyer of the Temple, who are to build it again in three days, save Thyself, and come down from the cross.”

They spoke indeed with some lingering remnant of apprehension—suppose even now

¹ Verse 28 is omitted by the Revised Version, following Lachmann and Tischendorf (so also Westcott and Hort and Weymouth), on the authority of ~~N~~ ABCD, etc. It was apparently introduced by the scribes from Luke xxii. 37 ; it does not seem to have belonged to the original text.

He were to come down from the cross. It was not too late for some terrible portent of Divine judgment. Standing at some distance a group of women who had followed Jesus from Galilee¹ watched the scene, not without a corresponding hope—faint and desperate—of deliverance.

Priests and scribes were there, making sure that the sentence was actually carried out, and that their victim did not escape them at the last moment. They were too dignified to join the common people in noisy derision, but amongst themselves they spoke in contemptuous scorn.

“ He saved others, but Himself He cannot save. Let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.”

They also spoke not without a dim, lurking apprehension that He might indeed come down, and some quieted an uneasy conscience with the thought that after all they were only putting Jesus to a final test. If He were indeed the Messiah, God would deliver Him.

¹ Mark xv. 40 f.

If God left Him to die, clearly He must be an impostor.

His companions in misfortune joined in the general scoffing. They, too, had thought that deliverance might come to this crucified Messiah, and that they might be rescued with Him. Disappointment aroused a sense of injury.

THE DEATH OF JESUS, xv. 33-41

As time went on the spectacle lost its novelty ; at that busy season men had little leisure, and there was much to distract their attention ; the crowd thinned, and the jeers became fewer. Now and then men passed by, coming and going from the crowded city, and paused for a while to look on ; there were new outbursts of derision. Throughout it all the guards remained about the crosses, and the women stood aloof to watch. Nothing else happened ; God did not rescue Jesus ; there was no sign on earth or in heaven. No voice from on high reached His ear ; no message of Divine comfort came to His heart.

Pain tortured His body ; the sense of public disgrace and conspicuous failure crushed His spirit ; and the slow hours passed by and brought no relief. Noon came and went, and the hope of deliverance waned and disappeared. When the followers of Jesus, especially the women who were spectators, recalled this terrible interval in after years, it seemed as if midnight had fallen in those noontide hours. It mattered not whether the sky was bright or overcast, for them the light of life was quenched. “ Darkness fell over the whole earth.”

About the middle of the afternoon Jesus broke His long silence ; a wild cry rang from the cross :—

“ Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani ? ”

“ My God ! My God ! Why hast Thou forsaken me ? ”

To the women these words were a confirmation of their despair.

But some of the bystanders, hearing imperfectly, thought that He called for Elijah, the forerunner of the Messiah. Who could tell what might follow this awful call ?

Even now, when the life of Jesus was almost spent, the prophet who brought down fire from heaven might appear, swift and terrible, to deliver the Messiah, and execute vengeance on His enemies. Moved by an unknown impulse, perhaps by the desire to be found ministering to the Messiah in case Elijah came, one of the spectators filled a sponge with vinegar, put it on the end of a reed, and put it to the lips of Jesus that He might drink. The guard would have stopped him, but he pleaded :—

“ Let me alone ; let us see whether Elijah is coming to take Him down.”

And they waited to see ; the heavens did not open to let Elijah come in his chariot of fire ; but their suspense was soon ended. The expectant silence was broken by another terrible cry from the cross, and when they looked they saw that Jesus was dead.

Thus the shrine in which the Blessed Spirit of Jesus had lodged was dismantled, and left empty of its Guest ; the veil of the Temple was rent asunder, and the Divine Presence departed. But even in its departing, neither

pain, nor despair, nor public shame, nor the clutching hands of death could wholly obscure the glory of that Presence. The last moments of Jesus wrung a testimony to Himself from a heathen spectator. The centurion in command of the guard stood opposite Jesus watching Him ; as he heard His last utterance and saw His end he exclaimed :—

“ Certainly this man was a Son of God.”

CHAPTER XV

THE BURIAL AND THE EMPTY TOMB xv. 42—xvi. 8

THE BURIAL, xv. 42-46

THE day drew on towards its close ; the dead body was left hanging on the cross ; and the women still watched. Someone, however, took the news of the death of Jesus into the city. His friends were anxious that His body should be rescued from the indignity of public exposure ; and if anything were to be done, it must be done at once. In an hour or two the sun would set, the Sabbath would begin, and no respectable Jew would help to take the body down from the cross. If it were not removed now, it must hang till the Sabbath was over. The Apostles had either disappeared, or did not dare to take the risk of interfering, and the dangerous task was left for one who had been less intimately asso-

ciated with the Master, a certain Joseph of Arimathea, a man of position, and a member of the Sanhedrim. Apparently, he was not actually a disciple, for we are simply told that he was "one of those who looked for the Kingdom of God." Such a man might not see his way to the formal acceptance of Jesus as Messiah, and yet might be full of love and reverence towards Him, and greatly moved to indignation and pity by His crucifixion. He plucked up courage, obtained audience of Pilate, and begged for the body of Jesus.

Pilate, as we have seen, had no feeling against Jesus, and had no objection to His being honourably buried; but on other grounds he hesitated to grant this request. Sometimes a similar permission had been granted a little prematurely; it had turned out that the criminal had not actually expired, and his friends had taken down a man supposed to be dead and had succeeded in restoring him to life. Crucifixion was a lingering death, and Jesus had succumbed long before the usual time. Was He really

dead? Pilate sent for the centurion, and questioned him as to the time of death. When he had satisfied himself that Jesus was certainly dead, he gave Joseph permission to bury the corpse.

Joseph bought a linen cloth, and having procured assistance, went to the place of crucifixion, took down the body and wrapped it in the cloth. Then he had it carried away and placed in a tomb hewn in the rock. They closed the opening by rolling a heavy boulder against it.

THE WOMEN AT THE TOMB, xv. 47—xvi. 8

All this was done hurriedly, that it might be finished in the short interval that remained before the beginning of the Sabbath. It was not the full and final burial, but only a temporary disposal of the body. Those who loved Jesus would wish to supplement these maimed rites; and it was perhaps intended to remove the body later on to some other grave. Two of the women had followed to the grave, and marked where the

body was laid. A little later the sun set ; it was the Sabbath, and nothing more could be done. But when another evening had come and the Sabbath was over, three of the women bought spices with which to anoint the body. It was too dark to go that evening, but they set out the first thing the next morning, with the earliest glimmer of light, and reached the grave soon after sunrise. Hitherto they had been too absorbed in their beloved Master to think of anything else, but as they drew near they remembered the huge boulder that blocked the entrance. Who would roll it away for them ? What were they to do ?

When they looked, however, they saw that the entrance was clear, and the grave empty — at least so it seemed ; but they ventured in, and saw a youth in white sitting on the right hand. As they stood, speechless with astonishment, the youth said :—

“ Do not be astonished, you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, He is not here. Behold the place where they laid Him ; but go and tell

His disciples, and tell Peter, ‘ He is going before you into Galilee. There shall ye see Him, as He told you.’ ”

But when the women recovered from the first shock of surprise, the removal of the boulder and the absence of the body suggested to them some awful happening, and they saw in the youth a visitant from another world. Half mad with fear, trembling in every limb, they made their way out of the cave as best they could, and fled, too frightened to tell any one what they had seen and heard.¹

* * * *

¹ Verses 9-20 were not part of the original text, see additional Note C, p. 280.

EPILOGUE

Here the narrative breaks off abruptly, probably through the accidental loss of concluding paragraphs. We may imagine the reader, whose impressions we have tried to put into words, learning that in the course of centuries the followers of Jesus formed societies spread over almost the whole world, embracing a large proportion of the human race, and controlling powerful states; learning, in short, that the personality of Jesus became the greatest influence in the world. He would be eager to discover the solution of the problem how all this had been the sequel of the Cross and the empty tomb.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

A. THE HISTORY OF THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST MARK

The imaginary reader whose impressions we have tried to record would wish to know the history of the document he had been studying. He would learn that the oldest copies of it now in existence are two manuscripts¹ written in Greek capital letters in the fourth century, perhaps about three hundred years after the death of Jesus. There are also numerous other copies in Greek manuscripts and printed books, and also copies in manuscripts and printed books in Latin, Aramaic, Egyptian, Armenian, Arabic, French, German, Italian, English, and hundreds of other ancient and modern languages. These various copies differ slightly in a number of minor points, but on the whole they tell substantially the same story, except that the later copies contain twelve extra verses.² The Greek *Mark* is clearly the original work, the copies in other languages being either translations from the Greek or translations of such translations.

References to this Gospel are found in writers from the

¹ The Codex Sinaiticus, **S**; and the Codex Vaticanus, **B**.

² See Additional Note *C*.

beginning of the second century onwards ; and it seems to have been used by the authors of *Matthew* and *Luke*, which cannot be much later than A.D. 100, and may be earlier ; so that our “Gospel according to St Mark” must have been written some time before the close of the first century, perhaps before the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Our student would have noticed that the book itself makes no statement as to who wrote it or when it was written. The titles, however, of the Gospel in all the copies connect it with the name “Mark” ; the two oldest copies¹ have the title “According to Mark”² ; and the early writers previously referred to speak of a Gospel composed by Mark, and some add that he committed to writing the reminiscences of the Apostle Peter. This tradition that the Second Gospel was written by St Mark, and in some measure rests on the authority of St Peter, is very generally accepted.³ We have no trustworthy testimony as to where or why or for whom the book was written, but are left to draw our own conclusions from the book itself.

The “Mark” in question is usually identified with a certain “John Mark” of whom we read as a cousin of Barnabas and a companion both of St Peter and St Paul.⁴

Hence our Gospel was written by an author who was acquainted with some of the chief actors in the events

¹ Cf. above.

² *Kata Markon.*

³ Some, however, would accept the authorship by St Mark, but hesitate as to the dependence on St Peter.

⁴ Acts xii. 12, 25, xv. 37, 39 ; Col. iv. 10 ; 2 Tim. iv. 11 ; Philemon 24.

which he describes, a member of the society which Jesus founded, writing within fifty years of His death. It is therefore a document of the first importance as furnishing data for a life of Christ.

B. ON THE METHOD OF THIS BOOK

Some time since the present writer was engaged on a study of *Mark* for devotional purposes, and was thus led to dwell carefully on the significance of St Mark's narratives considered by themselves, without reference to the other Evangelists. In the course of these studies he was continually surprised by discovering that what was said or left unsaid, and what was implied in the particular way in which St Mark put things, was often different from what he had expected to find in the Gospel. He felt that if he had been perusing his author more casually, he would have read into his narrative a great deal from *Matthew*, *Luke*, and *John*.

There must be very many for whom *Mark* is hardly allowed to tell its own story, but rather serves to recall a general knowledge of the Four Gospels. Ultimately, no doubt, we are bound to supplement and interpret *Mark* by the results of our study of other data, but in the first instance it is important to realise exactly what *Mark* means taken quite by itself.

With this end in view the present writer tried to construct for himself the impression which the Second Gospel would make on a reader who had no other sources of

information as to Christianity—to whom Jesus was entirely unknown until he came across *Mark*. As this exercise proved profitable and interesting, it seemed that the results might be useful to others. The idea of publication was encouraged by Dr W. Robertson Nicoll, and *The Life of Christ according to St Mark* appeared as a series of articles in the *Expositor*. It is now republished after some revision and with "Additional Notes."

The "impression" sought to be constructed would clearly vary according to the character, circumstances, and experience of the "imaginary reader" who is supposed to receive it. The possibilities are numerous and fascinating. The "imaginary reader" might be a Japanese or Tibetan Buddhist, an Agnostic carefully trained in all the wisdom of the twentieth century, but in some miraculous way protected from any knowledge of the story of Jesus or the history of the Church. But as far as this "Life" is concerned, the "imaginary reader" might be best thought of as an intelligent, well-educated Jew of our own times, devout yet liberal and modern in his Judaism. Absorbed in other interests, he has given no attention to Christianity or its literature ; Jesus has been a mere name to him, until he happens to read an edition of *Mark* which follows the ancient text in omitting the Appendix. Such a Jew, doubtless, would not be possible in actual life ; and the present writer cannot hope that his imagination has been sufficiently alert and powerful to maintain such a standpoint consistently. But the description just given may be useful in enabling our readers to grasp the idea of the book.

We will, however, offer an alternative description of the “imaginary reader”; let any one of our readers identify this hypothetical personage with himself; let him suppose that he has drunk a special water of Lethe, which wipes clean out of his memory all that he knows of Jesus and Christianity, but otherwise leave him and his knowledge and recollections unchanged. Let him suppose that in this condition he reads *Mark*, and let him ask himself how far the impression he would receive under such circumstances would agree with this “Life.”

Turning to a practical detail, we may point out that, in reproducing the sayings of Jesus, the narratives of St Mark, etc., the present writer has not aimed at giving an exact literal translation; he has rather paraphrased, because often a paraphrase conveys a more accurate impression than a translation. Moreover he has expanded and added many comments. Anyone who tries to construct a continuous narrative from St Mark must supply many gaps; usually this is done from the other Gospels, and from the conventional ideas as to the history of Jesus, and as to His teaching. Here an attempt is made to supply such gaps entirely from what St Mark himself might suggest, and from general considerations possible to a student who had no knowledge of Christianity.

C. THE APPENDIX TO THE
GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST MARK, XVI. 9-20

These verses have been omitted from the "Life" because there is conclusive evidence that they did not form part of the original Gospel according to St Mark.

The section is omitted by some of the oldest and most authoritative documents; by the two fourth century manuscripts of the Greek text, the Sinaitic (**N**) and the Vatican; by the Sinaitic Syriac, a fourth century manuscript of the ancient version of the Gospels into Syriac, probably translated in the second century; and by manuscripts of other versions. Other manuscripts of the Greek text¹ and of some of the versions contain the verses but indicate in various ways either doubts as to their genuineness or knowledge of the existence of such doubts. A Greek manuscript of the eighth century, L, Codex Regius, contains these verses, but also gives another alternative ending; and this second ending with slight variations is also found by itself in some manuscripts of the versions.

Eusebius of Cæsarea writing early in the fourth century states that the verses are absent from most Greek manuscripts; and similar statements are made by Jerome and other early Fathers, perhaps, however, merely on the authority of Eusebius.

The style of the passage is different from that of St Mark; the passage is for the most part a mosaic of passages from the other Gospels.

¹ Cursives, therefore comparatively late.

The introductory clause "Now when He was risen early on the first day of the week" would be quite unnecessary if this section were a continuation of xvi. 1-8, for we have already been told that the women came to the tomb "when the Sabbath was past . . . very early on the first day of the week," xvi. 1, 2. Moreover, as Mary Magdalene has been mentioned in the first verse of the chapter, we should not expect to find her described in the ninth as "Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven devils."

There are also other facts, too technical to be discussed here, which indicate that xvi. 9-20 did not form part of the original Gospel of St Mark.

It is true that the section is included in a great majority of manuscripts both of the Greek Text and of the versions; but this evidence, however great in quantity, is of far less weight than the testimony considered above. A work ending with xvi. 8 was obviously incomplete, and it would be entirely simple, natural, and justifiable to provide it with a conclusion compiled from the other Gospels; and when once this addition had been made, there would seem to most people no reason for omitting it.

But the careful study of the text of the New Testament in recent times has led most scholars to the conviction that these last twelve verses are not original, in spite of the natural popular reluctance to interfere with the text of the Gospel familiar through the Authorised Version; a reluctance which found expression in a learned, elaborate, but inconclusive volume by the late Dean Burdon. The later origin of the section has been maintained by Tischendorf and

Westcott and Hort, amongst a host of others ; and is not obscurely hinted in the Revised Version by the space which separates verses 1-8 from verses 9-20.

Our imaginary student of St Mark has been supposed to have read the Gospel in a manuscript or edition which followed the earliest extant authorities.

The Appendix to St Mark probably belongs to the first half of the second century. It cannot very well be earlier on account of the use it makes of the other Gospels ; and it cannot be later as it is known to Irenæus c. A.D. 180. A manuscript of the Armenian Version, dated A.D. 986, places before the Appendix the heading, "Of the Presbyter Aristion" ; this has been understood as a statement that the section was written by a certain Aristion or Aristo mentioned by Papias, early in the second century, and some scholars are inclined to accept the statement.¹ We add a translation both of this well-known appendix, and of the shorter alternative, which latter is also probably as old as the second century.

THE LONGER APPENDIX

(a) VERSES 9-11

THE APPEARANCE TO MARY MAGDALENE

(*Parallel to John xx. 1, 11-18 ; Luke xxiv. 10, 11 ; cf. Luke viii. 2*)

When He had risen early on the first day of the week,
He appeared first to Mary of Magdala, from whom He

¹ F. C. Conybeare, *Aristion, the Author of the Last Twelve Verses of Mark*, in the *Expositor*, Oct. 1893 and Sept. 1894.

had cast out seven demons. *She*¹ went and told His associates, as they were weeping and lamenting. And *they*, when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, did not believe.

(b) VERSES 12, 13

THE APPEARANCE TO THE TWO

(*Parallel to the Appearance at Emmaus, Luke xxiv. 13-35*)

After these things He was manifested in a different form to two of them, as they were walking, as they were going into the country, and *they* went away and told the rest, but neither did they believe *them*.

(c) VERSES 14-18

THE APPEARANCE TO THE ELEVEN

(*Parallel to Matthew xxviii. 16-20; Luke xxiv. 25, 36-49; cf. John xx. 19-29; Acts ii., xxviii. 1-10*)

Afterwards as the eleven were at meat He was manifested, and rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who saw Him risen. And He said to them, "Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature; he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not

¹ These underlined pronouns represent forms of the Greek *ekeinos*, which is usually emphatic.

shall be condemned. These signs shall follow those that believe: in My name they shall cast out demons; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay their hands on the sick, and they shall recover."

(d) VERSES 19, 20

THE ASCENSION

(*Parallel to Luke xxiv. 50-53; Acts i. 9-11*)

The Lord, therefore, after He had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and took His seat at the right hand of God. And *they* went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word by the signs that followed it.

THE SHORTER APPENDIX

But they reported all the charge given them concisely to Peter and his companions. And after these things Jesus sent forth by them from the sunrise even to the sunsetting the holy and incorruptible preaching of eternal salvation.

D. ON CHAPTER VIII. 1-21

In the "Life" this section has been omitted, mainly on account of the resemblance of verses 1-9, the Feeding of the Four Thousand, to the previously-narrated Feeding of the Five Thousand. Verses 10-21 are closely connected with the preceding section, and the whole portion we have omitted may very well have been taken from some variant account of this part of the ministry of Christ.

Some such view has long been held, especially in regard to the Feeding of the Four Thousand. H. Holtzmann, for instance, in his commentary on the Synoptic Gospels in the *Haud-Commentor zum Neuen Testament*,¹ says that it is pretty generally held that the two accounts of the feedings are parallel narratives which refer to one and the same event. The late A. B. Bruce, in the *Expositor's Greek Testament*, inclines to the same view. Of course the supposed reader of St Mark's Gospel, from whose point of view the "Life" is written, would be in no way concerned with modern criticism, because he would know nothing about it; but we may be interested to note that his impressions are confirmed by recent research, at any rate according to many authorities.

On the other hand the position that viii. 1-21 was not a part of the story as St Mark originally told it, is by no means a refinement of hypercriticism, but rather a view that would naturally commend itself *prima facie* to an

¹ Second Edition, 1892.

inquirer who was not affected by the presuppositions of Christian theology. The reasons in its favour are very much on the surface.

This section is, so to speak, in the air; it does not readily connect either with what precedes, or with what follows. Contrary to the usual practice of St Mark these twenty-one verses give no explicit notes of place. The mysterious and unique Dalmanutha is probably not a proper name, but an Aramaic phrase for "of those parts,"¹ which has been accidentally copied into a Greek version by a translator from an Aramaic original. If so we have only such vague terms as "the wilderness," "those parts," "the other side." This feature suggests that viii. 1-21 is derived from an oral tradition which had retained significant points only, rather than from the first-hand authority whom St Mark usually follows.

Apart from numbers and from the details of time and place, which are mostly absent here, the story is substantially the same as that of the Five Thousand. A multitude who have been some time with Jesus find themselves without food, the possibility of sending them to find food elsewhere is discussed and rejected, because they are in the wilderness. Jesus asks how many loaves they have. In vi. 38 they have five loaves and two fishes; in viii. 5 seven loaves; in each case we get the number seven. Jesus makes the people sit down; He takes the loaves, blesses them, or gives thanks, breaks them, and gives them to the disciples, who distribute to the people. These eat and

¹ Nestle in *Encycl. Bibl.*, where other exclamations of Dalmanutha as connected with "harbour," etc., are given.

are satisfied. The disciples gather up the remnants and Jesus sends the people away; afterwards He and the disciples go by boat across the lake.¹ On His reaching the other side, He is involved in controversy with the Pharisees. There is much verbal agreement in the accounts of the Feeding.

On the other hand the differences are such as would naturally arise in the transmission of the same story through divergent channels of oral tradition. For instance both agree in making the available food consist of loaves and fishes, and also in making seven the number of objects mentioned by the disciples in reply to our Lord's question, "How many loaves have ye?" Evidently both the number seven and the combination of loaves and fishes were standing elements in the story; in the Five Thousand the seven is obtained by adding two fishes to five loaves; while in the Four Thousand there are seven loaves, and the fishes are treated as a supplement, a relish to the loaves.

Again the difference in the number of the baskets is easy to understand; the twelve baskets of the Five Thousand would be suggested by the number of the Apostles; the seven of the Four Thousand by the seven loaves and the general predilection for sevens.

There is hardly any real difference in the numbers fed; the narrative would only profess to give a rough popular computation, according to which "five thousand" and "about four thousand" might have much the same mean-

¹ In vi. 46 the disciples start first, and Jesus joins them later, walking on the water.

ing. No exact census would be taken at the time, and there would be no official statement as to the numbers, people telling the story might speak of "four or five thousand"; these versions of the tradition became stereotyped in different circles, one gave "five thousand," another "about four thousand." Probably there is a connection between the "five" loaves and the "five" thousand; each helped to fix the other.

Other differences in details as to incidents, conversation, and wording, e.g., the use of different words for the "baskets," are very slight evidence against the identification of the two narratives. If the Five Thousand alone had stood in *Matthew* and the Four Thousand alone in *Mark*, as obviously equivalent narratives of the same event, many popular commentaries would have found no difficulty in maintaining that the two were quite consistent.

If we conclude that viii. 1-9 is a variant of the narrative of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, and therefore must be omitted from any account of the Life of Christ, we can no longer place viii. 10-21 at this point of the story, or even retain those verses just as they stand, because in their present form they are dependent on the narrative of the Feeding of the Four Thousand; nevertheless the paragraphs in question may be modifications of ancient and genuine traditions as to our Lord's teaching.

In the above, as in the "Life" itself, we have tried to represent the natural *prima facie* impression made upon a thoughtful reader, whose only source of information was the Second Gospel. It is not part of our plan to discuss whether the complete evidence at our disposal, exhaus-

tively estimated according to all the resources of criticism, indicates one or two Feedings of a Multitude.

It is, however, desirable to mention that the problem is still an open question, and that it is still possible to quote eminent scholars in support of the view that there actually were two Feedings. For instance Oscar Holtzmann, in his *Life of Christ*,¹ treats the Feeding of the Five Thousand as a real, but non-miraculous event, and the Feeding of the Four Thousand as another similar event. His account is inevitably vague, thus, Jesus "finds Himself constrained not to let these people, mostly poor folk, and some of them living at a distance, depart from Him without food of some kind. When He communicates His resolve to the disciples, the smallness of their own stores and the great number of those who are in need of food awaken misgivings in them. Yet here again Jesus maintains that cheerful, unfaltering confidence of His. The task is accomplished in such a manner that all are satisfied. . . . Having once succeeded in feeding a multitude in this way, it was, of course, only natural that Jesus should come forward and help in the same way on another occasion." Other scholars accept the two Feedings in less rationalistic fashion.

Therefore for the sake of completeness we add a treatment of this section on the lines of the "Life."

¹ English Translation, pp. 287 ff

THE FEEDING OF THE FOUR THOUSAND, viii. 1-9

"In those days," when Jesus, after His visit to Sidon, had turned southward and was somewhere on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee; "in those days," He was in some uninhabited district, engaged in teaching a great multitude. They had been with Him for three days and their stock of food was exhausted, so that He found Himself a second time surrounded by a hungry, starving crowd. He called His disciples, and said to them:—

"I am sorry for the multitude, for they have already been with me three days, and they have nothing to eat; and if I send them away fasting to their homes, they will faint by the way, for some of them have come from a long distance."

The disciples answered:—

"Where can anyone get bread to satisfy all these, here, in a wilderness?"

He asked them how many loaves they had, and they answered "Seven." Then He bade the multitude sit down on the ground, and took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake them into portions, and made the disciples distribute them to the multitude. Then someone further discovered a few small fishes; these also He blessed, and had them distributed,¹ so the people ate their fill; and

¹ This verse 7 reads like a later addition, inserted to bring the narrative into closer agreement with that of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, possibly at a time when this section was circulating independently, before it had been incorporated in *Mark*. If so, it was apparently regarded as an alternative version of the Feeding of the Five Thousand.

seven baskets full of superfluous portions were gathered up afterwards ; although no fewer than about four thousand had been fed. Having thus relieved their hunger Jesus sent them away.

Here, as in the narrative of the Five Thousand, the narrative is vague ; apart from difficulties as to how such a multiplying was possible, the account does not enable us to picture what happened.

A SIGN REFUSED, viii. 10-13

As soon as the multitude were gone, Jesus and His disciples took to their boat, and crossed to the other side, presumably to the Western or Jewish shore of the Sea of Galilee.¹ Somewhere in this district there seems to have been a gathering of Pharisees, or the reference may be to the members of that sect in some large town, such as Tiberias or Capernaum. At any rate a company of Pharisees "came forth" from their home or some place where they sojourned, betook themselves to Jesus, and proceeded to harass Him with questions as to His authority. Who did He profess to be? How did He work miracles?—if He did work them. What right had He to put Himself forward as a public teacher, and to lay down the law in His high-handed fashion? His tone, His words and acts implied a claim to a position of great authority. How could He justify Himself? They heard that He wrought cures—so did other wonder-workers ; He cast out

¹ On Dalmanutha, see above, p. 286.

devils, well—exorcism was a regular profession. His claims needed to be sustained by more convincing credentials ; nothing less than a sign from heaven could be accepted.

Jesus would not allow Himself to be drawn into a wrangle, and would rather reassert His authority than attempt to justify it by argument. But He could not help feeling that in this demand for a sign from heaven, the Pharisees represented the great majority of the more religious Jews ; they could not accept the truth of revelation, they were not susceptible to spiritual influence, and they could not recognise the authority of a pure and holy character, unless these were associated with miracles, startling physical miracles ; and He groaned in spirit. How could the Gospel of the Kingdom win its way amongst a people whose faith depended on material wonders ? He exclaimed indignantly, “Why does this generation seek a sign ? I tell you in truth : No sign shall be given to this generation.” Then wearied with the persistent brow-beating of the Pharisees, He left them : and He and His disciples betook themselves again to their boat, crossed the lake, and sought refuge in the Gentile districts on the eastern shores.

THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES, viii. 14-21

On the voyage Jesus brooded over His recent experience ; at last He broke out :—

“ Beware, be on your guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod ! ”

Now the disciples had forgotten to provide themselves

with bread, and had only one loaf with them in the boat ; and *their* minds were preoccupied with this practical difficulty, so that they understood Jesus' words as a prohibition of partaking of unclean food. The partisans of Herod would be careless about ceremonial rules, and any food obtained from them would probably be unclean ; possibly, too, their Master was excommunicating the Pharisees, and directing that anything connected with them was to be avoided. They discussed His words and said one to another, "We have no bread." Jesus overheard them, and said :—

"Why are you discussing your lack of bread? Do ye not yet understand or comprehend? Is your heart hardened? Are you blind though you have eyes, and deaf though you have ears? Do you not remember? When I brake the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets¹ full of portions did you take up?"

They say to Him, "Twelve."

"And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many baskets² full of portions did you take up?"

They say to Him, "Seven."

He saith to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

There the dialogue ends ; we do not know how Jesus' last question should have been answered ; and we are not told what was meant by the "leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." As the most obvious moral of the conversation is the failure of the disciples to comprehend their Master, we may conclude that they did *not* under-

¹ *Kophinous.*

² *Spuridōn.*

stand, and that Jesus let the discussion lapse because He despaired of making His meaning clear to them.

If this voyage was the actual sequel to the interview with the Pharisees, the “leaven” is the tendency, common to Pharisees, Herodians, and many others, to demand signs, physical marvels, as credentials of spiritual teaching. Jesus warns His disciples against adopting this criterion of His authority ; they must not ask that His gospel should be vouched for by miracles.¹

E. THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION

At first sight considerations of time and space in view of the periods mentioned and the indications of our Lord’s itinerary might seem to exclude a point as far south as Horeb, *i.e.* somewhere in the desert to the south of Palestine. But the conversation or conversations recorded in viii. 27—ix. 1 began and were continued on a journey ; the record may refer to more than one day. The “six days” of ix. 2 may well stand for about a week ; and again the absence of statement as to the interval of time between ix. 13, the descent from the mountain, and ix. 14, the return to the disciples, does not necessarily imply that the interval was very short, or that the reunion took place at the foot of the mountain. In so incomplete and fragmentary a narrative, the immediate sequence of two

¹ Owing to the crossing and recrossing of the Lake, this section leaves Jesus in the district in which it found Him. Its omission, therefore, does not dislocate the geography of the Gospel.

paragraphs is no evidence that the events recorded followed immediately one on the other without any gap. The present writer fully recognises the great difficulties involved in the identification of Horeb with the Mount of Transfiguration, but they do not seem to be insuperable ; and the hypothesis is quite as probable as many that are advanced with much confidence.

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